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THOMAS DRYBURGH'S DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

MARY DERRICK'S HOME.

IT was a poor, little place, possessing few enough of the attributes of home. An attic twelve feet square, with a sloping roof and white-washed walls, from which the winter rains had stripped much of the plaster, a broken, moth-eaten floor, and a narrow chimney so near the roof that the light could stream in and the rains descend upon the low-grate in which, on a cold, October afternoon, a feeble spark of fire dimly burned: such was Mary Derrick's home. She was sitting in the little window in the fading light, bending over a coarse garment, sewing as for dear life. It was such a sweet face upon which the pale October light lingered, and an attractive one still, in spite of the sad lines and curves, which could not have been planted there by the hand of Time, for

she was still very young, little more than a girl, one might have said, though the badge of wifehood glittered on her left hand. Though she had been in sore straits sometimes, Mary Derrick had clung fast to her wedding-ring, the only thing left to remind her of that brief but happy dream from which death had so cruelly awakened her. Yet not quite the only thing; there was another and a dearer link to the happy past, something which was the blessing, and yet the keenest care of Mary Derrick's life. In one corner of the little room there was a low flock bed, on which, covered tenderly up by an old faded plaid, lay a little child. The curly hair lay in bright, golden ringlets on the brow which was much whiter than the pillow upon which it rested,—for linen washed and dried in the grimy atmosphere of the Undergate was not quite so pure as the driven snow. It was a sweet wee face, but one looked in vain for the chubby, rosy fulness which, to my thinking, is the chief loveliness of childhood. The cheeks were sharply outlined, the pretty mouth drawn a little at the lips, and the closed eyes encircled by great purple shadows, which were very pitiful to see, and the breath came from between the parted lips in short gasps, followed at times by a low moan, which seemed to indicate that the sleeper suffered uneasiness or pain. When such a sound would break the dreary stillness, the anxious mother would look

fearfully round, and press her hand to her heart as if she too suffered, then would bend to her work again, with the shadow deepening in her sweet, sad eyes.

Although the little room was quiet, there was plenty of noise outside. It was Saturday afternoon, pay Saturday too, and the public-house at the corner, just below the attic window, was reaping its usual harvest. Groups of men, still in their working garb, stood lounging, pipes in mouths, at the "public" window, talking and laughing; sometimes the shrill angry voice of a woman demanding her share of the earnings made a variation—not, however, a very pleasant one; then there would be a burst of coarse laughter, and perhaps a few oaths as the dispute betwixt husband and wife waxed louder. The Undergate was not considered a very respectable locality, and it was only such as had lost respect for themselves who were content to abide in its unsavoury dwellings. It had been no little trial to Mary Derrick to come down so far, but necessity is a hard task-mistress, and house-room in the Undergate was cheaper than anywhere else in Dunleith. For that reason it commended itself to the young widow. But though she dwelt among the denizens of the Undergate she was not of their order, for she had seen better days. Ten o'clock rung presently from the belfry of the old parish kirk of St. Magdalene, and then Mary Derrick rose, and stirring the fire

very carefully lest a hungry flame should too quickly consume the precious fuel, set on the kettle. She was faint for lack of food, having tasted nothing since breakfast. Ere she sat down to her work again, she bent lingeringly over the child, thankful that she still slept; it was the only rest or comfort the suffering little one knew. A little, bursting sob broke from the mother's lips as she hastily turned away to the window, for it seemed to her that her darling had grown more wan and worn since yesterday, and that there was a look in the wee white face too closely resembling that which her father's face had so often worn towards the close of his long illness. There was not very much to be seen from the little garret window, only a vast net-work of roofs and high chimney-stalks, and away eastward the tall masts of the shipping in the docks. The red, October sun was sinking to his rest on the western horizon, but only a very faint reflection of his farewell glory illumined the grey and foggy atmosphere of the Undergate. Mary Derrick looked out upon the dreary prospect, but saw none of it. Ah, no! Her yearning eyes saw only at that moment a grey, rambling old house, standing among shadowing elm trees, whose boughs rustled in solemn unison with the rush of the wimpling burnie which turned the old mill wheel. In these old trees the rooks had had their habitation for generations; and in the quaint

UNDERGATE ON SATURDAY AFTERNOON.

country garden the same sweet old flowers had bloomed summer after summer, seeming only to grow more fragrant and beautiful as the years went by. Oh, for a breath of that pure, sweet, bracing air! Oh, for a glint of the silver flowing stream! Oh, to hear once more the cawing of the rooks, and the music of the old mill wheel!

A low and somewhat hesitating knock at the door interrupted the widow's reverie. She stepped back and cautiously inquired who the intruder was ere she turned the key in the lock.

"It is Mrs. West. My husband is the minister of St. Magdalene," replied a sweet, kind voice. "Won't you allow me to come in?"

Mary Derrick hesitated a moment. Hitherto she had kept her door resolutely closed against the Bible-women and the district visitors, for she was proud in the midst of her poverty, and would not make exhibition or trade of her circumstances, as too many of her neighbours did without scruple. But the voice was gentle and winning, and it was long since she had spoken in confidence or sympathy to one of her own sex. After that brief hesitation she turned the key, and, opening the door, signed the visitor to come in. Then she relocked the door and turned to look at the intruder. She was quite a young lady, and her face was one of the sweetest Mary Derrick had ever *seen*—*not* only because of its natural

beauty, though that was very marked, but because of the sweet spirit of loving-kindness which shone in the earnest eyes, and played upon every feature. She glanced compassionately round the poor little room, and her eyes grew dim.

"Won't you tell me your name?" she said gently. "I have tried your door several times, but have never been able to gain admittance. I concluded that the room was unoccupied, until a woman down-stairs told me you lived here."

"I heard you, at least, I heard the knocking," replied Mary Derrick, with just a little touch of defiance in her tone; "but I didna open'd on purpose. Although I'm puir, I've never needed, nor taken, charity."

Mrs. West's eyes were troubled a little as she answered, "It was not to offer charity I came, but to speak a kind word, or help you a little if I could. Is this your little baby? oh, what a lovely child!"

As she spoke Mrs. West set down the basket she carried, and stepped over to the side of the bed; whither Mary Derrick felt impelled to follow her.

"She does not look strong, poor little thing," said the minister's wife, gently. "I love babies. I have two of my own, you see," she added, with a swift bright smile. "Have you had a doctor to see her recently?"

"No; but I ken what's the maitter. Her faither deed no' lang ago. It's jist a dwinin' like his. She'll slip awa' sune.' Mary Derrick spoke quite

quietly, but there was a dreary ring of despair and hopeless misery in her voice.

"I would not be quite so certain about that," said Mrs. West, speaking cheerfully. "It is wonderful what a little skill and good nursing can do. We must see what can be done for your dear little one. Now, don't look at me like that! You must not be so wilfully proud; though I like you all the better for it. I won't offer anything except on the understanding that you will repay it when you can," she added, with a little humorous smile which was like a flash of sunlight on her face. She knew so well the proud, patient nature with which she had to deal; young though she was, Adelaide West was an unerring judge of human nature.

"But it is our duty and privilege, as children of the same Father, to help and comfort one another;" she went on, quietly. "But, we will arrange about baby afterwards; come now, tell me a little about yourself. It is not out of curiosity I ask, believe me, but because, when I know more of your circumstances I can help you better, you know. It is out of gratitude for my own great happiness that I try to do a little for the Master; and you will help me to do it, will you not?"

Mary Derrick looked wonderingly for a moment into the sweet, earnest face, and then dropping her head on her hands, burst into tears.

CHAPTER II.

SYMPATHY.

VERY wisely Mrs. West allowed that healing stream to have freest vent. She guessed how long the natural feelings had been pent in Mary Derrick's sad breast, and, knowing that she had touched the heart of the lonely widow, she was content to wait till words could come.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Derrick at length, speaking in trembling, apologetic tones; "but I couldna help it. It is so long since a body spoke a kind word to me. I didna ken I was so weak."

"Hush, hush! Don't excuse yourself, I pray. I am glad to see these tears," said Mrs. West quickly. "I can guess how very lonely and sad your life must be. It must be a terrible thing to be a widow."

"Ay, is it," said Mary quietly. "Mair terrible yet when the guidman was a' the freen' a woman body had in the warld."

"You have neither father nor mother, then? You are an orphan?" said the minister's wife quietly.

"Yes, I am an orphan," said Mary Derrick briefly; and then there was a momentary silence. She did not intend to communicate very much of her personal history evidently, but Mrs. West had respect for her reticence, because it showed that her womanly pride and reserve had survived the change in her circumstances.

"Ye hae a kind face an' a kind heart, mem," said Mary presently, "so I 'll tell ye my bit story; though ye are the first ane wha has heard it frae my lips sin' I came to Dunleith. Ye 'll no ken a bit bonny clachan aboot twenty miles sooth frae here, ca'd Balwhinnie?"

"I have heard of the place, though I have never been there," replied Mrs. West.

"Weel, I was born an' brocht up aboot a mile frae it, at the Girnel Meal Mill, whaur my faither was born an' brocht up afore me, an' mony o' his forbears afore him," said Mary Derrick, with a dreamy look in her shadowed eyes, telling that her thoughts had wandered far from her present surroundings. "Dryburgh o' the meal mill is a weel-kent name in that country-side; an' it 's weel kent yet, I suppose, though I hinna heard muckle aboot the place for lang. I was an only lassie, an' my mither deed when I was born. I had ae brither

Tammas by name, wha was ten years aulder than me. My mither never had but the twa bairns, an' I hae whiles thocht it was a peety I didna dee wi' her; but that 's jist when my heart gets gey faur doon, ye ken, an' a' the warld looks dark. My faither was a hard man, for the Dryburghs were aye misers, hardly just wi' greed, so I hadna a very blithe time o' it when I was a bairn, an' lang afore I was oot o' my teens I was keepin' the hoose, weighed doon wi' the care o' garrin' a wee pickle gang a lang way, when neebors' bairns o' my age were playin' thirsels on the green. So it made me auld afore my time. When I was saxteen my faither deed suddenly, an' left nae wull; so, by the law, the mill an' what bawbees there were belonged to Tam. They telt me I couldna claim a ha'penny, but I wasna carin' much then, for I didna ken what a pooer money is in the warld, nor hoo impossible it is to get on withoot it. My faither had been a hard man, sweer to part wi' a bawbee even to pay a just debt, but my brither was ten degrees waur. He wad hardly eat hissel', nor let ither folk eat, an' mony a bickerin' we had. There wasna muckle love lost atween us, for besides bein' so much aulder, Tam was a soor, queer, morose man, wi' a kittle temper it wasna very easy to put up wi'. I was different again, for though I had a hot enough temper tae, I was blythe an' cheery, like what my

her was in her young days afore the spirit was
and oot o' her by years of oppression. I wad
he ta'en up gladly wi' young folk, but they were
hy o' comin' to the Girnel, for Tam didna show
them muckle kindness. But though he could keep
folk awa' wi' his soor looks and snappy words, he
couldna prevent me gaun oot, sair though he tried
it, an' mony a happy nicht I spent under a neebor's
roof, when Tam was sittin' nursin' his ill-temper in
the dreary cauld kitchen at the Girnel. Mony a
body advised me to leave him, and seek service some
other gate, whaur I wad be baith better paid and
better treated; but somehow I never could mak' up
my mind to leave the auld place. Ye see, I kent
every stick and stane about it, an' I whiles thocht
I couldna sleep without the noise o' the burnie in
my ears in the nicht time when the wheel was
quate.

"So things gaed on for a year or twa, until ae
hairst time, at a maiden, I met my ain guidman,
Stephen Derrick." A quick sob broke from Mary's
lips as she uttered the dear name which was
engraved on her heart in letters of gold.

"He was an English lad, as ye may hae guessed
frae his name, an' was an orphan like mysel'. He
was a clerk here in Dunleith, but hadna been stron
for a lang time, an' as he had saved a wee pick
bawbees, *had cam' oot to* the hills for a breath

caller air to mak' him strong for the winter in this dreary toon. He was bidin' at the inn in the clachan, an' as his bright cheery way won a'body's heart, he was sune acquaint roond aboot, an' was aye welcome at the fireside, for, though I say it, he could tell a story an' sing a sang wi' onybody, and he played the fiddle like a professional. I saw him for the first time at the maiden at Leerie Law, an' he crackit a heap to me, an' we danced thegither mair nor ance, and syne he took me haine to the Girnel. Weel, I needna say muckle mair aboot it, ye hae been coortit yersel', an' ye ken hoo the thing gaed on. But ye canna ken what a precious glint o' sunshine my love was to me, for my life was that lanesome that whiles my heart was like to break for the things ither lasses had in plenty. So when Stephen gaed back to Dunleith, he took wi' him my plighted troth. As sune as he had made a pickle to plenish a bit hoosie I was ready to come.

"Stephen spak' to Tam afore he gaed awa', but he said very little. The frank, fearless way which made a'body like him seemed to hae an effect even on my brither. He only said ae thing. He askit him if he kent that I had nae tocher, nor a bawbee I could ca' my ain, an' telt him that as he was a puir man he could gi'e me naething. Guid forgi'e him for the lee, for he had hunders in the bank, the half o' which was mine by richt, though the law said no.

Stephen spak' up, an' said it was me he wanted, an' nae tocher or bawbees, at which Tam gied a bit soor laugh, which made my lad's cheek burn; but for my sake he held his peace. I dinna ken what it was, but a' that winter I had a miserable time o'd. It took me a' my time to pit up wi' my brither, he was that snappy and ill-tempered, an' nearer than ever. I whiles telt him we wad sune no get saut to oor kail. He was aye flingin' oot a bit sly reproach at me tae, tellin' me that efter a' he had dune for me, I was ready enough to leave him, an' gang aff wi' the first man that speired my price. But the well o' happiness in my ain heart keepit me frae bein' sae sair hurt wi' his sneers; and so the winter wore awa', and in the simmer time I was mairret. We had nae merry-makin', nor naething. Stephen jist cam' oot ae Saturday, an' we gaed to the manse, an' went frae there to the station, man and wife. Tam wadna come, an' the witnesses were the minister's maid an' Mrs. Semple hersel', and she was greetin' when she wrote doon her name. I ken it was oot o' sympathy for me, an' she kissed me after I was made a wife, for my mither's sake she said, and the minister gied me a new five-pound note, to buy something for the hoose. So I was blithe an' happy as a queen. My brither's greed was the talk o' the toon, but what did I care though he gied me naething for my years o' faithful *service?* He wad hae my account to

settle wi' a Higher Power, so I left him to his ain conscience, an' I can honestly say I never uttered a hard word against him, though I was whiles sairly tempted. Weel, we set up hoose in a bonnie wee cottage oot o' the toon, and though there wasna muckle in't, and though we had to coont every shillin' afore we spent it, we were as happy as the day was lang. Happy! I never kent afore hoo bricht the sun could shine, nor what a bonnie warld I lived in, till love cast a glamour ower it a'. I micht tell ye something aboot my man, only I daurna trust my tongue. Ye hae a man o' yer ain, an' if ye lo'e him, ye 'll ken what I thought o' mine. Maybe we were ower happy, an' maybe had he been spared I micht hae forgotten that there was onything beyond this life; an' so he was ta'en awa'. It was aboot three years efter we were mairret, and Tibbie, there, was just a sax-month bairn when I began to notice first that my man wasna weel. I canna linger on it, mem, ye 'll understand, I think, without muckle tellin'. He ailed for aboot a year; but aye workit awa' for my sake an' for Tibbie's; but at last he lay doon, an' for a twelvemonth I was the bread-winner for him, an' me, an' the bairn; an' syne he was ta'en awa'. He left me wi' words o' hope an' comfort, mem," continued Mary Derrick, when she was again able to speak. "He telt me God wad tak' care o' me an' the bairn, until we

should meet again; an' though whiles I hae been very near despairin', I hae never lost grip o' his last words. Efter it was a' past, I cam' into the toon, and workit on for the bairn an' mysel',—an' until thae hard times cam', I could aye mak' bite an' sup for us baith. But, as the time gaed by, work got scarcer an' scarcer, an' I 've come doon by degrees, till I had to flit here, an' I think it 's the air o' the Undergate that 's killin' my bairn. Ye see she 's no lang for this warld, an' maybe when she 's ta'en awa' the Almichty 'll hear my prayer, an' let me slip awa' up beside my treasures."

Mary Derrick ceased speaking, and kept her eyes fixed on the fire, as if her thoughts were still with the past. The hard, bitter, miserable expression had gone from her face, leaving it so sweet and gentle that Adelaide West was struck by its beauty. Ay, verily, sympathy is good for the human soul!

"I need not say I am sorry for you, you must know it," said Mrs. West, laying a kind hand on the widow's shoulder. "I thank you for telling me your story. And now, will you allow me to make a suggestion? I cannot think, with you, that your little girl is really so hopelessly ill. It seems to me that she only requires good food, and good nursing, and purer air to make her well. Have you ever heard of the Children's Hospital in Dunleith, Mrs. Derrick?"

CHAPTER III.

THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

"I AM afraid Mrs. Derrick must have heard from her brother, Robert, or she would surely have called before now," said Mrs. West to her husband one morning, about ten days after her visit to the dreary garret in the Undergate.

"It is quite possible that the man may have repented of his harshness, and gladly acceded to her request, dear," replied the minister, rather absently; for his mind was occupied by the plan of his discourse for the following Sabbath morning.

"I do hope so, and yet I scarcely think it," said Mrs West with a slight sigh. "Flossie, dear, make less noise, or I must send you to the nursery. Papa is busy, my pets."

"Never mind, dear. Let them have their frolic, they don't disturb me," said the minister, with an indulgent smile at the two tiny fair-haired girlies playing bo-peep behind the draught-screen.

The popular minister of St. Magdalene's Church never studied better than when his wife and little ones were in the room beside him, and was seldom too busy or too deeply engrossed to attend to them. He was almost boyish still in his love of fun and frolic, and yet there was not in all Dunleith a more earnest, hardworking, self-denying minister of the Gospel, nor one whose labours were more abundantly blessed.

"Please, ma'am, there's a woman in the dining-room wishing to see you," said a servant's voice in the doorway. "She bade me tell you her name was Mary Derrick."

Mrs. West instantly sprang up.

"How curious, Robert, when we were just speaking of her! Yes, Ellen, I will be down directly. Now, my darlings," she added to the children, "don't be too noisy while mamma is gone. Robert, will you come down in a little and see Mrs. Derrick? I am sure you will be interested in her."

"Yes, send Ellen when you wish me, and I will come," responded the minister readily, and his wife left the room.

When she entered the dining-room, what was her astonishment to see not only Mary Derrick herself, but her child, closely wrapped in an old plaid, and tightly clasped in her arms. She was also much struck by the change in the widow's face. It was even more

pale and haggard, and there was a wildness in the eye, which seemed to indicate some unusual agitation of mind. "My poor Mrs. Derrick! How could you bring baby out on such a bitter morning?" exclaimed Mrs. West. "We were just talking of you, and wondering whether you had gone home to your brother's. Come over to the fire, your lips are quite blue with cold."

"No, I'll no sit doon," said Mary Derrick hurriedly. "You were richt, an' I was wrang. It was a vain hope to think that there wad be a spark o' pity in my brother's heart. My bairn seems to be waur, I think she's gaun to dee. She can hardly get her breath; so I cam', because you are the only freen' I hae in the wide warld, to see if ye wad tell me whaur that place is that ye telt me aboot. She micht be warmer and better there, and dee easier, for I hinna haen a fire in my garret since the day afore yesterday."

Mrs. West looked inexpressibly shocked.

"You ought to have come before now, but we will lose no time. It may not yet be too late to save your child's life," she said quickly. "Sit down at the fire, while I send for a cab and get on my bonnet. I will go with you myself."

Mary Derrick looked the thanks she could not utter, and obeying the kind invitation to rest herself by the fire, she drew nearer to the grateful warmth;

for the bleak November wind had penetrated her poor thin garments, and chilled her through and through.

Mrs. West looked into the study on her way to her dressing-room, and while she hastily threw on her outer garments, her husband went down to speak a word of hope and comfort to the forlorn and stricken heart downstairs. By the time Mrs. West was ready the cab was at the door, and the two women, so differently placed, and yet drawn together by the common bond of motherhood and Christian sympathy, took their seats and drove away in silence. It was half-an-hour's ride to the hospital, which stood at the other side of the town, beyond its busy thoroughfares, on the slope of a gentle eminence facing the winding river. It was surrounded on every hand by the trees, which had taken so kindly to the soil that they made quite a shelter and shade for the house which had been a home indeed to many a poor child in Dunleith. It was a plain, substantial building, studded by many long, wide windows, upon which the wintry sun shone brilliantly, as if anxious to bestow all his light and heat upon the Children's Home. A plain, iron gateway gave entrance to a wide gravelled path, which swept round to the front door; but there was a stretch of grass sloping down to the river's bank, which was wonderfully green for November, and which was

actually dotted here and there with sturdy, pink-lipped gowans, which had not yet succumbed to the icy touch of King Frost.

Mrs. West was well-known to the attendants at the Children's Hospital, and though it was not the usual hour for visitors, she and her charges were at once admitted and conducted to the matron's room. With what keenness did Mary Derrick's eyes dwell upon the sweet, kind face of the motherly woman in whose care her darling was about to be left!

"We are quite full, I fear, Mrs. West," said the matron, in a quiet, pleasant voice, which had a ring of refinement in it. "But if you will wait one minute, I will inquire. I think one of the little ones leaves to-day, and I should not like to refuse *you*."

Mrs. West nodded and smiled. The matron left the room, but was not absent many minutes. "Yes, we can take the baby in. Let me see her, if you please," she said, stepping towards the mother and the child. Without hesitation Mary Derrick unwound her shawl, and showed the wasted little form and the pale, worn face of her little Tibbie.

"Poor, wee thing!" said the matron with motherly kindness. "She looks very poorly, but we will do our best for her."

Then she stepped to the bell-rope and rang, a summons which was immediately answered by a

pleasant-faced nurse attired in a soft grey gown, a white apron, and dainty muslin cap.

"Here is another charge for you, nurse," said the matron. "Doctor Hamilton has not gone, has he?"

"No, ma'am."

"Ah, then, let him see her. Are they getting the cot in the west ward ready?"

"Yes, ma'am, it is quite ready."

"That is good. Take baby with you."

Mary Derrick bit her lip till it bled, so great was the wrench at giving her darling up into strange hands. It almost seemed like desertion, she thought; and yet these kind faces, and the whole air of the place inspired her confidence.

"You can see your little one thrice a-week. The visiting hours are from two to six," said the matron kindly. "You had better leave your address, however, and if the child should grow any worse we will send for you at once."

"Mrs. Derrick lives at present in the Undergate, but it is likely she will remove from there," said the minister's wife. "To-morrow is a visiting day, I think, so she may be able to give you her address then."

"Very well; now I must bid you good morning, Mrs. West," said the matron smiling. "I am so busy I would need two heads and ever so many pairs of hands. *Christmas* will be upon us before we

know where we are, and before we are half ready for it."

"Good morning; but may I crave another favour?" said Mrs. West. "I think Mrs. Derrick would go away happy if she could see the place where her baby is. Would it be too much trouble?"

"None at all," said the matron pleasantly. "If you will just sit down for a few minutes, I will send a nurse to show you the west ward."

"Hoo d' ye ken a body's thochts sae weel?" asked Mary Derrick tremulously, the moment she was left alone with her kind friend.

"I am a mother myself," was Adelaide West's answer. Then a little silence fell upon them, and the sunbeams stole in at the window and danced merrily on the walls and floor as if quite pleased with their morning's work. In a few minutes another nurse, just as comely and pleasant as the one who had taken away poor wee Tibbie, entered the room and asked them to accompany her, which they did, up a long flight of spotlessly clean stairs, and along a wide corridor, where one would look in vain for any blemish or speck of dust; and at the end of which the nurse opened a door and motioned them to enter. It was a large, light, pleasant place, with a large fire burning at either end, and there was an air of comfort, of luxury even, about it which would strike a *stranger at once*. The delicately tinted walls were

"DAINTY LITTLE COTS."

adorned by illuminated texts and brightly coloured pictures, and draught-screens, covered with gay pictures, stood about wherever there was likely to be a draught, not only fulfilling a useful function, but adding to the brightness and comfort of the place. There were other things too, rocking-horses and swinging chairs, dainty little stools, and restful lounges for the convalescent to enjoy, but it was at none of these things Mary Derrick looked, although they were all included in the first glance she cast about her. Now her attention was riveted by the rows of dainty little cots, each with its childish inmate, some lying still under the cosy bright coverings, and others sitting up among snowy pillows, playing with a toy or looking at a picture book. It was all so different from anything she could have imagined that she stood quite still, with an expression of absolute wonder on her face. "You will not be afraid to leave your little Tibbie here, I think," said the sweet voice of Adelaide West. "Isn't it a nice bright place?"

"I wish I had kenned o'd afore; I wish I had brocht Tibbie here lang syne," said Mary Derrick almost in a whisper. "What a sicht! but I didna ken."

"Step this way, and I'll show you the cot where your child will lie," said the nurse presently, and Mary Derrick followed the slight figure up the long ward, looking from *side to side* upon the little child-

ren, with all her heart in her eyes. In the very sunniest, cosiest corner of that sunny cosy place stood a little empty bed, with the clean snowy sheets folded over the bright quilt, waiting for its occupant.

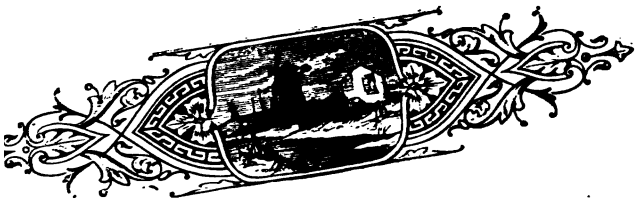
"Here is the nurse bringing Tibbie," said Mrs. West, touching Mary Derrick's arm. They had taken away the old plaid and the poor thin garments which had been the bairn's scanty coverings, and when the nurse unrolled her from the blanket, the eager mother saw a fair fragile little form clad in a bright pink flannel gown, and looking for all the world like a snowdrop, so pure and pale was her face.

She smiled, and tried to clap her baby hands languidly at sight of her mother, who stood by, while the nurse with kind, deft hands placed her in the little cot, laying her golden head on the snowy pillow, and tucking the clothes snugly round her.

"Doctor Hamilton has looked at her," the nurse said, nodding pleasantly, "and he thinks we will bring her round in a while. It is just good nursing and nourishing food she requires, and she will get them all here."

Mary Derrick's eyes were blinded by a rush of tears. She turned swiftly, and after bending to kiss her darling's blue-veined brow, knelt by the side of the cot and hid her face.

Those standing by turned away for a little, knowing that her head was bowed in grateful prayer.



CHAPTER IV.

THE GIRNEL MEAL MILL.

NOW it rained, to be sure! Not a gentle, refreshing shower, which is rather pleasant than otherwise, but a fierce resistless blast dashing noisily against the window-panes, and battering the poor sodden leaves into the muddy ground; swelling mountain torrent and wimpling burnie, and turning the mill stream into a raging flood. The bare boughs of the willows and alders growing on its banks bent before the blast until they dipped in the angry tide, and some of the older branches broke, and were carried off on its foam-flaked breast, away, away, to the distant sea. Then what a wailing the wild winter wind made round the grey old house! It would shriek and moan through the unshuttered casements, and then creep stealthily along the empty corridors and long dark passages with a strange eerie noise, enough to call up terrifying visions of wraiths, and warlocks, and witches, and other uncanny things which love to

abroad on a windy night. It was such a big, rambling, roomy building the house at the Girnel Meal Mill, just such a house as would need a pack of children to fill it with sunshine and healthy happy din, but alas! it was empty, and sad, and desolate, tenanted by one solitary, miserable, human being. He need not have been miserable, no, nor solitary, for he had the wherewithal to make himself and others happy, only greed of gold held him in its relentless thrall. There he sat by the smouldering kitchen fire, a thin, spare, almost attenuated figure, clad in coarse, poor garments, and shivering in the chill and dreary atmosphere of the great gloomy place. The miller's kitchen need not have been a gloomy place either, for if only a pile of blazing logs had crackled in the wide chimney, and a cheerful lamp replaced the wretched dip candle feebly flickering on the mantel, it would have been a bright, cheery, pleasant place, as it had once been long ago. The plates in the big plate rack behind the dresser were thick with dust, the tins and brasses dim and yellow for want of polishing, the smooth stone flags dingy with the dirt of years, cobwebs hung in graceful but not lovely festoons from the oaken rafters, the whole place had an air of neglect and decay painful to see. The only cheerful or companionable thing in the miller's kitchen was the old eight-day clock ticking solemnly in its corner, where its pendu-

lum had wagged for nigh a hundred years, and whose wise old face and faithful voice never ceased to warn Thomas Dryburgh of the flight of time.

The miller was leaning back in the high-backed old-fashioned arm-chair, which claimed equal antiquity with the clock, and his elbows rested on its well-polished arms, while his lean fingers were touching each other at the tips, and his small eyes fixed meditatively on the fire. Thomas Dryburgh was thinking of what? He was not an ugly man, not even plain; but the face which might have been so pleasant to look upon, and which nature intended to be so, was disfigured by many lines, and hard, cruel curves, which age had not planted there. The mouth looked as if it had never learned to smile, there were no gracious kindly curves in the cheeks or about the firm resolute chin, and the eyes had a furtive, restless gleam in their depths, which seemed to indicate that their owner was not satisfied, and that he was always looking and hoping for more than he had.

Presently he lifted the candle from the mantel, set it on the little deal table by the side of the chair, and took out a well-thumbed and very dirty pocket-book, in which he proceeded to make some calculations.

"Thirteen acres in the Well Park, fower-an'-twenty in the Haugh, besides seeven at the hoose, an' the gairden grund that's near an acre itsel'," he muttered

to himself. "I 'se warrant there 'll be five-an'-forty acres if there 's a pole, besides three kye an' fifty hens, an' a' the hoose gear, but then there 's the wuman hersel' !"

The latter part of the above speech Thomas Dryburgh uttered with a prodigious sigh, and again sank back in his chair to further meditate upon the subject which had been engrossing his attention for some time back, and which he had very nearly settled to his satisfaction. The acres to which he had so lovingly and longingly referred just marched with his own lands at the mill, and for years Thomas Dryburgh had coveted his neighbour's possessions, and longed to add them to his own. But then, as he regretfully remarked, there was the woman herself, and the only way to obtain possession of her desirable belongings was to take her to the bargain! Truly no wonder the idea should cause Thomas the deepest thought! And yet she was a comely, pleasant, lovable enough dame, who had had no lack of lovers in her youth, nor in her prime either, but who for some reason or other had elected to remain single up to this present time, when she was now somewhat past middle life.

"It wad be an awfu' expense," continued the miller, uttering his thoughts aloud. "An' weemen are extravagant craturs; but maybe I could sune break her in, an' it 's a cosy biggin', an' she maun hae hunders in the bank; I believe I 'll risk it." Observe

hat Thomas did not take into account the possibility f Miss Thorburn refusing the honour of an alliance with him. Living in solitude, as he did, he had but little knowledge of the ways of women, and had a vague idea that any who remained unmarried, did so simply because they had never had a chance to set sail on the sea of matrimony. Taking up his pencil again, he proceeded to make a further calculation of Miss Thorburn's income and expenses, which proved so satisfactory that the shadow, but only the merest most ghostly shadow of a smile touched for a moment his long thin lips.

"Yes, I 'll risk it," he repeated, firmly. "It 'll mak' an' odds here tae, for it is gey an' lanesome at nichts, an' she 'll be a body to crack till; an' we 'll let Leerie Law house, an' maybe the kye to some dairy body, an' there 's plenty room for her bits o' furniture here."

Having thus settled the matter to his own satisfaction, Thomas Dryburgh felt somewhat inclined to go upon his courting errand there and then. But the night was wearing late, and the storm did not appear to be abating; and, besides, there was no need for such immediate haste.

"She micht think I 'm ower keen, an' if she be like other weemen-folk, she 'll think muckle enough o' hersel'; as it is, I had best begin as I mean to end."

With this wise reflection, the miller ventured to give the sickly-looking fire a careful poke, surprising it into a feeble flame; then he leaned back in his chair again, and gave himself up to visions of the future, when the sonsy face of Nancy Thorburn should be nodding to him across the hearth; sentimental thoughts which presently disappeared in calculations as to how he could work Leerie Law cheaply and to the best advantage. After a time, however, his mind began to revert to other and less pleasant themes, which would not be set aside. In place of Nancy Thorburn's comely face he saw another, that of a woman too, or rather a girl, sweet, and earnest, and wistful, lighted by two big grey eyes, which seemed to be looking with solemn pathos into his. It was the face of his sister Mary, the young sister he had so cruelly wronged, and so vivid was every feature that he almost started, thinking she was veritably before him in the flesh. But no, the kitchen was quite empty, unless it was peopled indeed by the shadows of the past, and there was no sound to be heard but the swaying of the elm boughs, and the wailing of the winter wind. Why should the pleading reproachful face rise up before him to-night, of all nights, when he had other and pleasanter things to dream of? He grew quite irritated at length; for instead of leaving him, these reproachful memories crowded thick and fast upon him, until he seemed to sit

shivering and cowering among the phantoms of other days. Slowly he drew out his pocket-book once more, and took from it a folded sheet of paper, which he spread out upon his knee. It was against his will he opened it, against his will he read it, but he did not seem to be able to help himself. It was a poor, trembling scrawl, for the writer had never received much education; but there was no mistaking its meaning, its terrible, heart-probing pathos. Thus it ran:—

"319 UNDERGATE,
DUNLEITH, 31*st October*, 18—.

"DEAR BROTHER,—I am in great distress, or I would not write to you. I am a widow now. Stephen died two years ago. Since then I have managed to work for myself and my little girl; but work is scarce, and wages very low, and we have nothing but charity between us and want. My bairn is very ill, dying for want of the things I cannot give her. Will you let me come out to the Girnel to see if the fresh air would do her any good? I could work for my meat, and my lamb eats but little. If you would let me come, and would send a few shillings to pay my way, I would find some way to repay you. I know I am asking a great deal from you, especially after I married against your will. But I never rued my marriage, brother; for I had one of the best of men. For the sake of any little happiness we ever had together in the Girnel, I implore you to grant my prayer.—I am, your distressed sister,

MARY DERRICK."

Slowly and with unchanging face Thomas Dryburgh read and re-read these words, and each time they

seemed to irritate and annoy him more. At last he tossed the pitiful appeal into the fire, where it was consumed very slowly, as if the red embers were reluctant to destroy it. The upper half of the first sheet, with the address on it, fell from the grate to the fender, and the miller involuntarily stooped and picked it up. And he sat looking at it for a long time, with the same stolid, unfathomable expression on his face. "She's made her bed, an' she maun lie on 't," he muttered to himself at last, thrusting the charred scrap of paper back to his pocket-book and rising heavily from his chair. "But if I get a' thing settled at Leerie Law I'll send her a pound, and maybe a bag o' meal."

CHAPTER V.

THE MILLER'S WOOING.

"I MAY pit the bar i' the door, I believe, an' mak' mysel' comfortable for the nicht," said Nancy Thorburn to herself. "The bodies 'll never come for their milk in sic' a doon-poor." Suiting the action to the word Nancy went to the back door, peered out into the rainy darkness for a second, and then shut it, and slipped in the bolt. It was eight o'clock, her cows were milked, and the byre door carefully closed, and a wisp of straw pushed into the big key-hole, lest Mysie, her favourite quey, should catch cold, the hen-house was locked, and everything trig and snug for the night. Nancy's work was done till the dawn of another day. When she returned to the kitchen, she dropped into her big, chintz-covered easy-chair with a sigh of content. Well, it was a very snug fireside, and as to being a lonely one, Nancy Thorburn would never be lonely nor solitary so long as she had *her work to* do, and her sonsy cat, Jock,

to keep her company. There he sat on his favourite stool, big, sleek, complacent, lazily blinking at the dancing fire, the very picture of feline contentment and felicity. There was not a white hair on his coat, a fact of which he and his mistress were both proud. If Jock was sleek, and comfortable, and comely to look upon, so was his mistress, in her neat, well-fitting merino gown, black apron, and snowy neckerchief about her shoulders. Then what a pleasant face shone out beneath the little lace cap which Nancy had only adopted of late, because she was not so young as she once was, she would say, nor her hair quite so abundant as it had been twenty years ago. It would be exaggeration to say that Nancy Thorburn, or Miss Thorburn of Leerie Law, was a handsome woman, but she was one at whom you would feel inclined to look twice, because the first look gave you so much pleasure. She was what country folks term "braw." Her face was broad, and her cheeks ruddy, her dark eyes full of that happy light which is born of contentment and good-will, her whole expression kindliness itself. Nancy Thorburn's name was a household word in Balwhinnie, and Leerie Law the paradise of every bairn in the clachan, because from its hospitable door none were ever sent empty away. When anybody wanted a message sent to Leerie Law there were a score eager for the job; for Nancy's joking word and kindly

smile gave double zest to the scone or the big slice of home-made cake of which she seemed to possess an inexhaustible store.

"Ay, Jock, an' Thursday 'll be Christmas day," said Nancy, after she had contemplated the glowing fire for a little. Jock cocked his left ear, but did not otherwise reply to his mistress's remark. "An' next Thursday 'll be New Year, Jock," continued Nancy musingly. "My certy, ye 'll hae tae ca canny that day, my man, for there 's fower-and-twenty bairns comin' to their teas!" Jock cocked both ears at this, and languidly lifted his eyes to his mistress's face. She nodded at him, and was about to make another remark, when, in one of the pauses of the wind, there came a smart double knock to the front door. "Guid save us, wha can that be, at the front door tae? Jock, gie 's a caun'le."

It was most amusing to hear Nancy addressing Jock just as if he were a maid-servant, and to observe the intelligent interest with which that well-trained animal listened. Jumping up, Nancy took a shining brass candlestick from the mantelpiece, lighted the candle, and proceeded "ben" the passage to the front door.

"Wha 's there?" she asked cautiously, for she was a lone woman with no protector, except the big collie in his kennel in the close, and he was barking furiously as she *spoke*.

"It's me. Tammas Dryburgh, Miss Tho'burn," answered a man's voice.

"Tammas Dryburgh!" echoed Nancy. "Is there onything wrang at the Girnel?"

"No. I want to see yersel', if ye please," replied Tammas.

"Weel, gang roond to the back door, an' I'll let ye in. Yer feet'll be a' weet, an' there's nae use makin' a needless dirtyin'," said Nancy calmly; and in some little astonishment she turned away and proceeded to unbar the kitchen door.

"It's surely a parteekler errand that brings ye to Leerie Law on sic a nicht, Maister Dryburgh," said Nancy, as the miller, in response to her invitation, stepped across the threshold. "Tak' aff yer coat see, an' yer hat, an' hing them up there."

As regards her house, Nancy was a thorough o maid, it was a real grief to her to see a needle dirtyin', which was a favourite expression of he The miller obeyed, rubbed his feet well on the ma and was then permitted to step into the bo bright, heartsome kitchen, which was the co corner in all the house at Leerie

"Tak' the warm seat, Mr. Dry cordially, for though she heartily she could not be unkind to a livi

"No, I'm fine here," said t down in the arm-ch

blythe old David Thorburn, had been wont to sit before he left this world for a better. "What's the maitter wi' the beast?" he asked, for at sight of him Jock fled from his stool, and with back and tail erect, was spitting at him from under the table. Nancy smiled. Jock was a wise cat, and a discriminating judge of human nature.

"Be quiet, Jock, like a man," she said shaking her finger at her pet. "Weel Tammas, this is an unco nicht. Ye wad hae a fell stravaig atween the Girnel an' Leerie Law."

"It was na that bad," replied the miller rather lamely, for somehow the thing which had seemed so easy and simple at the Girnel fireside, assumed a very different aspect here. An awkward silence ensued, Nancy waiting to be enlightened regarding the object of the miller's visit. She was greatly mystified, not only with the visit itself, to begin with, but with the appearance of the miller, who had not looked so wise-like for many a day. He had on a new suit of grey homespun, and actually a white collar, and a new necktie, and his beard was newly trimmed, and his hair nicely brushed. What on earth did it all mean?

"Ye've a cosy ingle-neuk here, Nancy," he said at length, feeling that he must make some kind of beginning.

"I hae nae reason to complain o'd, Tammas," was Nancy's *brief reply.*

"Kin' o' lanesome though, is 't no, for a wuman body bidin' her lane?" he pursued, gathering courage.

"Maybe for some weemen folk, but I 'm never fashed that way; I hae my wark, an' plenty neebors when I want them. It 's folks' ain blame, I 'm thinkin', when they feel lanesome or discontented, there 's aye something wrang wi' theirsels," said Nancy, looking the miller straight in the face, for she was speaking of him, as well as to him.

"Ay, ay, I believe ye 're richt," said the miller; and then there was another dead silence.

"Hoo 's things gaun up by?" said Nancy at length.

"Middlin', jist middlin', I 'm gettin' aboot tired o' my way o' daein'," said the miller, feeling that this was a splendid opening.

Nancy nodded. "I 'm gled to hear tell o 'd. Ony word frae Mrs. Derrick this while?"

The miller grew red in the face. "No, at least no' this while," he said a trifle confusedly; for the dark eyes bent unflinchingly on his face seemed to read his inmost soul. "Ye 'll no can guess, I suppose, what 's brocht me here the nicht, Nancy?" he said in desperation, for the conversation must be turned away from the subject of his sister.

"No, I 'm jist waitin' to be telt. As ye 're no a neeborly man for ordinar', I suppose ye want some*thing, or ye* wadna be here."

"Ye are richt, Nancy, I dinna waste my time clashin' in folks' hooses, whatever be my fau'ts. Weel, I've been thinkin' twa three things ower this whilie, an' I canna see what way you should bide your lane in Leerie Law, and me my lane at the Girnel, when the twa pairts mairch thegeither sae weel. What wad ye say to mak' a match o'd? I'm no a rich man, but I hae twa three bawbees for a rainy day, an' ye ken the Girnel 's my ain. If ye 'll gree, Nancy," he continued speaking faster and with greater eagerness as he warmed to his subject, "I 'll mak' ye a canny man. I 'm sure we could jog along fine thegeither, although we 're baith ower auld to mak' fules o' oorsels."

Nancy Thorburn first sank back in her chair in helpless astonishment, and then as he proceeded, and his meaning began actually to dawn upon her, she sat up very straight, and there was a very peculiar expression on her face.

"Tak' time afore ye answer, Nancy," said the miller quietly. "Ye 're a sensible wuman, an' I 'm sure ye 'll see the advisabeelity o' my proposal. It 's a quate fireside at the Girnel, an I 've often thocht I wad like a wuman body in the hoose."

"Lord help her, whaever she be!" fell fervently from Nancy's lips, a remark which caused Thomas Dryburgh to look at her inquiringly. Somehow the bonnie *sonsy face* was changed. The smile was

gone, the sunny gleam had vanished from the dark eyes, and they gleamed upon him fearless, cold, and stern.

"What div ye say, Nancy? I 'm no that ill. 'Gie a dog a bad name,' they say,—ye ken the rest. I hinna haen a chance," he said almost humbly, for the advantages of his proposal to himself were very obvious.

"Did I hear ye richt? ye askit me to mairry, didna ye, Tammas Dryburgh?" said Nancy presently.

"Ay, I *am* askin' ye. I 'm in earnest, Nancy."

"So am I; ye said richtly that *I* was ower auld to mak' a fule o' mysel'. What div ye tak' me for, Tammas Dryburgh?"

Tammas was silent. The question was not encouraging.

Slowly Nancy rose to her feet. "I micht be angry if it wad dae ony guid," she said quietly, but with a ring of indignation in her voice. "I didna ken I had gien ony evidence o' bein' oot o' my seevin senses, which I wad be if I listened to your offer. So I 'll bid ye guid nicht, Maister Dryburgh, wi' mony thanks for your trouble."

"Wull ye no tak' me, Nancy?" asked the miller helplessly, rising from his chair.

"Tak' ye?—no. No though I should hae to beg frae door to door. I ken ye ower weel, Tammas Dryburgh. Ye ken hoo ye treated that dear lamb,

yer sister Mary. I hinna forgotten it. I ken weel eneuch it 's my siller an' my gear an' Leerie Law ye 're efter, no' me. But I 'm no donert yet. I ken when I 'm weel aff, an' as lang as I can get my bite an' my comfort at my ain fireside, it 's no likely I 'm gaun to sterve at the Girnel," said Nancy, speaking very fast, for she was much agitated, and her fingers shook as she lighted the candle to show her unwelcome suitor to the door.

"Ye 'll maybe think better o't," said the miller, in no way disconcerted. "It disna dae to hurry weemen folk in sic maitters. Weel, I 'll jist be stappin'. Guid nicht, Nancy. I 'll maybe look ower some nicht neist week."

"Deed ye needna," said Nancy, quite snappishly for her. "Gang hame, Tammas Dryburgh, an' sit doon by yer meserable hearth, an' try an ca' up a' the folk ye hae wranged wi' greed an' hardness o' heart. The auld year 's very near dune, an' ye dinna ken whether ye may live to see the new ane in. Ask God's mercy for your sins, an' syne dae what ye can to repair them. That 'll set ye better nor seekin' a wife. Guid nicht; may I be forgi'en if I 'm ower hard upon ye, but I 'm no' able to stand sic a thing frae you at my time o' life."

Feeling very peculiar indeed, Thomas Dryburgh put on his coat and hat and stepped out into the rain. Recovering himself on the doorstep he turned

and looked into the sonsy face which expressed h mingled indignation and anger. Was it to expr his regret, or to tender an apology for the mistake had committed? not quite.

"Guid nicht, Nancy, yer birse is up," he sa calmly. "If ye should think better o'd ye can me ken." Nancy Thorburn so far forgot herself to bang the door and push in the bolt with angry hand. Then she hurried back to the kitch and sinking into her own chair gave way to a bu of hysterical laughter, which finally ended in a "gu greet."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DREAM.

THE miller trudged through the rain to the Girnel, feeling that he had made a mistake. Courting a wife was not quite so simple a thing as he had imagined, and as Nancy Thorburn had spoken with unmistakable decision, he feared that the cosy homestead and the fertile acres of Leerie Law were not for him. Well, he was but where he was before, and yet as he stepped across the threshold of his dreary home, and entered the big cold kitchen, he heaved an involuntary sigh. There was a difference betwixt Nancy Thorburn's fireside and his; was it due to the mere fact of a woman's presence? Nay, there were many other things besides that lacking in the Girnel. He had "gathered" the fire with a lump of coal and a shovelful of dross before he went out, and it was still smouldering dimly, though giving forth neither light nor heat. He was loth to break it up, however, for it might *last till* morning if left undisturbed

So he lighted the candle, took off his best coat, and donned the old green one with the long tails, which were the laugh of the country side, and the butt of every bairn in the clachan. Then he pulled the arm-chair close to the fender, and held out his cold hands to the feeble spark glimmering in the grate. As he did so he glanced round the big kitchen, the darkness of which seemed only made visible by the flickering flame of the candle; and something like a shiver ran through his frame. Was it the contrast between his own miserable home and the one he had so lately left which struck him chilly to the heart? Never had the place seemed so cold, and empty, and eerie, and for the first time for many a long year Thomas Dryburgh felt dissatisfied with himself and his surroundings. He had wealth, but what did it profit him? Had he comfort, or happiness, or even peace with it? Ah, no; none of these white-winged angels spread their wings above the roof-tree of the Girnel. Many strange unwonted thoughts took possession of him as he sat there; the dreary stillness which was only broken by the solemn tick of the old clock, which, familiar though it was, seemed to have a new note of reproachful warning in its voice. Certain words too, which the mother who had loved him had been wont to read on Sabbath mornings from the Book which now lay dust-be*grimed* and moth-eaten on the shelf, rang their *changes in his* unwilling ears.

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon;" "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and again, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The warning cadence of those long forgotten words which the anxious mother had striven to implant in the heart of her boy, fearing lest his father's greed of gold should enchain him likewise, rang in Thomas Dryburgh's ears, growing fainter and fainter as the drowsiness of sleep began to creep over him. He leaned back in his chair, his hands fell on his knees, and his lids dropped over his restless eyes. And after a moment it seemed to him that a faint white light began to steal into the place, dispelling its gloomy shadows, and then he felt a firm but gentle touch upon his arm.

"Come with me," a voice said; and when he looked round to discern whither it came, he saw a white-robed figure by his side, and a face, half veiled, and wearing an expression of reproachful sadness, bent searchingly upon his own. He tried to demur, but the gentle touch grew firmer, and the eyes looking into his had a touch of command in their depths which compelled him to obey. So he rose unsteadily to his feet, and then the kitchen seemed to fade away, and in place of the chill yet close heavy atmosphere which was never purified by the free air of heaven, he felt the cool night-wind play upon his

brow, and knew that he was out-of-doors. To his astonishment he felt himself mounting above the earth, upborne apparently by the touch of the mysterious companion by his side. The rain had ceased, and the clouds were breaking overhead. Here and there a sweet and solitary star would peep shyly up, and away over the hills a mystic halo indicated the rising-place of the Christmas moon. Far beneath he saw the clustering roofs of the clachan, with its circle of outlying farm-places and homesteads, among them the Girnel and Leerie Law; but in a short space of time these were left in the far distance as they sped through the air in a northerly direction. Where, oh where, was the mystic messenger taking him? He ventured to ask the question, but she silenced him by a mournful shake of the head and a wave of the left hand, and he spoke no more.

As they sped onwards the air seemed to grow less clear, and presently Thomas Dryburgh learned its cause, for they were approaching the confines of what appeared to be a great city. He saw the wide, dark stretch of roofs, relieved at intervals by a graceful spire or a tall chimney-stalk, and as they drew nearer he could discern a forest of masts, which indicated that it was a shipping-place.

"Knowest thou this place?" asked the messenger, speaking for the first time since they began their flight.

He tremblingly replied, that "it somewhat resembled Dunleith."

The messenger nodded gravely, and as they were now directly above the town, they began to make a rapid descent, until they paused under the gloomy arches of a railway bridge. Then it seemed to Thomas Dryburgh that the gentle fingers tightened on his arm as he was drawn into a cold, damp corner, safe hidden from the public view. A soft light, shed apparently by some invisible lamp, fell upon what seemed at first to be a heap of something, but which the wondering miller presently discerned to be two children closely clasped in each other's arms, and apparently asleep. They were in rags, shoeless, hatless, shirtless, poor little arab lads, crouching close together to obtain what little heat they might from each other. The little bare feet resting against the cold wet flags were rough and discoloured, and one had an ugly open wound bleeding with the cold.

Thomas Dryburgh shivered as he looked.

"O Chairlie, I 'm cauld! I think I 'll dee wi' the cauld!" muttered the younger of that pitiful pair; then his companion rose, and taking off his own miserable jacket, wrapped it round his brother though his own teeth were chattering in his head. A great lump rose in Thomas Dryburgh's throat, and involuntarily his hand sought his pocket. B

the messenger prevented him, and pointed with pitying finger at the brothers, said mournfully,

"Behold! One of thy neglected duties."

"Let me gi'e them something; a bawbee, or my coat," he said pleadingly. But the messenger only shook her head.

"Too late!" was all she said, and again impelled him to go forward. A little way farther on the tiny figure of a little match-girl was seen running towards them as if for dear life. She, too, was bareheaded and barefooted, and the bitter winter wind played rudely with the thin old shawl and the ragged frock, which were her only coverings. She was weeping, and every bursting sob seemed to probe Thomas Dryburgh's heart like a two-edged sword. Again his hand sought his pocket, and he heard his money jingling; never had the sound seemed so delightful in his ears. But again he was withheld.

"She suffers, and will suffer, for the lack of what thou possessest," said the messenger sadly; "but it is too late!"

And again they sped onwards. Passing rapidly beyond the wide, pleasant streets and crescents where stood the abodes of the rich, they sped across to the river, which was reached by many a narrow *alley and filthy* lane, in which were the homes, or *haunts of the* very poor. In one of these they

alighted, and began to walk slowly up a narrow lane, with high tenements on either side, the like of which Thomas Dryburgh had never seen before.

"Here, enter this way with me," said the messenger pausing at a low, dark doorway, and though Thomas hesitated a moment, he was obliged to obey. There was the din of drunken revelry in one of the lower rooms, sounds of coarse laughter and brutal jest, and then a woman's shrill scream. But all these the messenger passed unheeded. Up, up the narrow broken stairway, up to the very top, and then the feeble wailing of a child fell upon Thomas Dryburgh's ears. The messenger pushed open one of the many doors on the landing, and they entered together. What a poor little place it was; only twelve feet square, with a sloping roof, and a little window scarcely big enough for a sparrow to peep through. It was damp too, for there were little streams trickling down the bare discoloured walls, and the drops of the passing shower were pattering down the chimney on the grate; where, alas! no fire burned, not even a red ember to relieve the cold, grey, cheerless ashes. The room was not quite dark. A candle flickered on the broken table, sending its fitful gleam across the floor, and revealing yet more pitifully its desolation. By the table a woman sat plying her needle and thread. A cold perspiration broke over Thomas Dryburgh as he scanned these pinched and wan

features, for they seemed strangely familiar. Ay, once these thin cheeks had been round and red, once these pale lips had rivalled the bloom of the cherry, once these shadowed eyes had been bright as sunshine. On the little low bed a child lay moaning as if in pain. After listening to it for a little the woman rose, and lifting it in her arms, began to croon a low song, which had no music in it, but only the wail of despair. And yet that sweet voice had been wont to trill as noisily and clearly as the lark uprising to the morning sky—but that was long ago.

"The morn, my bairnie, we 'll hae something to eat and drink," she whispered as she laid the hushed child back on the weary pillow; then she went to her work again until every buttonhole was made, and every button in its place. Folding it up, then she laid it aside, and taking a half-sheet of paper from the mantel began to write. Even from where he was Thomas Dryburgh could read the trembling words she penned. What was it she wrote? Words of reproach or bitter upbraiding such as he deserved? No, no,—"Dear brother." Were these two simple words not an awful mockery of his pain?

He tried to dart forward, but again he was resolutely withheld. "Let me gang!" he cried fiercely. "It 's my ain sister! It 's Mary! Let me gang doon on my knees till her! Let me gang!"

"Too late!" fell yet more sadly from the messen-

ger's mournful lips, as she slowly pulled him away. He struggled desperately, but in vain. Then the whole scene vanished, the clasp on his arm relaxed, and he opened his eyes. The fire was out; the candle at its last gasp on the mantel. The old clock in the corner rang twelve. Thomas Dryburgh rose to his feet, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him. He was at his own fireside in the Girnel kitchen.—and behold, it was a dream.

CHAPTER VII.

THE AWAKENING.

"WHAUR 'LL the miller be gaun the day?" said the station-master to Robbie Wilson, the postman, when he brought down the mail-bag to the eight o'clock train for the North.

"The miller! whaur is he?" queried Rob, squinting with his only available eye along the platform.

"There he is, mun, jist at yer back; wheesht!" said the station-master, stifling a laugh, as Rob in his haste and confusion turned round and knocked up against the miller. Contrary to his expectation, Thomas Dryburgh did not growl or swear at him, but only said quietly, "Cauld mornin', Rob," and passing out of the little shed, sauntered, hands in pocket, along the platform.

"Whaur did he tak' a ticket till, Geordie?" queried Rob, in an intensely interested voice, for he was consumingly fond of news.

"*Dunleith.*"

"There 's something up. When did ye see Tammas wi' a clean collar on afore?"

"Is this a corn market at Dunleith?"

"No, it 's on Fridays. There 's naething to tak' Tammas Dryburgh to the toon the day that *I* ken o'. I thocht maybe ye wad ken."

"No, but I 'll sune find out. I 'll tell ye what I think. It 'll be something to dae wi' Mary," said Rob, with a peculiar knowing twist of his ill-favoured countenance. "It 's, lat me see, mair nor a month syne I cairrit a letter to the Girnel, and the writin' was unco like Mary Dryburgh's."

"Ay, it 'll jist be that. Wad it be ill news, I wunner? There hasna been a cheep aboot Mary Dryburgh heard in thae pairts sin she mairret the English lad; but nae news, they say, 's guid news."

"So they say. The miller's a wee dowie like, div ye no think? He was unco canny for *him* this mornin'. It 's no often ye get a ceevil word frae him."

"Yer richt;—but there she 's comin'. Tammas is the only passenger the day, seemin'ly. We needna ring the bell for him. Is thon the minister runnin' fit to break his neck? He 's a shuffle-katie o' a cratur, aye ahint," said the station-master, and then,—oh, for the hypocrisy of human kind,—turned to touch his hat to the minister, and to assure him blandly that he was in good time. Then the train puffed in *with a great shriek* and bang, the miller jumped into

a third-class compartment, the minister into a first, and off she went again without losing a minute. There was little time lost either at any of the intermediate stations, for passengers were few and far between. But in another week trains and officials alike would be groaning under the burden of the holiday traffic. Dunleith was reached at ten minutes past nine, and even that big station, where so many lines converged, presented rather a bleak, deserted appearance. It was a raw, damp, disagreeable morning. Snow had fallen on the previous day, and being followed by a partial thaw, the streets were covered with a mixture of mud and slush. A thick fog hung low over the river, and was disagreeably felt in the town. In the windows of warehouses and offices the gaslights flickered still, the daylight being of the dullest, dingiest kind.

The streets were lively enough, however, for men of business and their clerks alike were hurrying to their work. In the principal thoroughfares shopmen were beginning to dress their windows prior to the exodus of the ladies at noon. It seemed to the miller that Dunleith must have overslept itself; every one seemed to be in such a hurry, even the errand-boys resisting the temptation to look in at the confectioners' and toy-shop windows, which were all gaily decked for Christmas time. At a crossing the miller spied a policeman leisurely pacing up and

down, and looking as if nothing in the world could or would ever put *him* in a hurry. Guessing rightly enough that this individual could give him any information he required, Thomas marched up to him.

"Cauldish mornin', freen'," he said civilly. "Maybe ye could tell me whaur the Undergate is, could ye?"

"Ay, that coot she!" answered Donald, with ready Highland politeness. "It pe doon there, see, and syne alang py ta railway prig, till she comes to ta watter. Then ony pody'll tell her whaur it pe efter that."

"Muckle obleeged," said the miller, and then as Donald was looking very significantly at him, a look which seemed to remind him rather pathetically that it was near Christmas, he actually produced three coppers, which the defender of the peace acknowledged by a broad grin, and a very hearty "Thank her, kindly." Then the miller trudged off to follow Donald's somewhat vague directions as best he might. After walking a little distance, he reached the railway arch, which seemed quite familiar to him, though he was positive he had never been there in the flesh. His dream, however, was very fresh in his memory, and when he stood beneath the arch he turned aside to the quiet corner under the wall, almost expecting to see the little ragged laddies clasped in each other's arms. But if they had ever been there, they were

gone now, and, abusing himself for his foolish fancy, he proceeded towards the river. Meeting a message-boy at the corner of a narrow lane, he inquired for the Undergate, and was directed to go to the other end of the lane, and then turn to the right, and he would find himself in it. With heart beating a little faster, Thomas Dryburgh gave the lad a copper, and hastened down the lane. When he turned to the right and saw the long narrow, squalid thoroughfare, with the crazy-looking houses on either side, the dirty, dingy, little provision shops, and the flaring gin palaces, he felt a trifle eerie, for it was down this very street his mysterious guide had led him in his dream. Strong, robust countryman though he was, the close, heavy air, reeking with foul fumes and noxious vapours, almost sickened him. How did the hundreds who knew no other habitation live, and breathe, and have their being in such a place? Ay, well might he ask himself the question, and think with longing of the free winds and the fresh, pure airs blowing about the Girnel. He dared not pursue the thought further, and ask how his sister supported existence here. No; it was too bitter and heart-probing a question. He took out his pocket-book and carefully read the address on the scrap of paper which had providentially escaped the fate of the letter itself. 319 were the figures, so he went slowly up the middle of the street, keeping

count of the numbers on either side, an object of curiosity and remark to such as were abroad at that hour. At last, near the farther end of the thoroughfare, he reached the low doorway with the figures painted above it, but almost illegible. A slatternly woman, with unkempt hair, unwashed face, and arms akimbo, stood on the step, surveying the well-dressed stranger with all the curiosity of her kind.

"Mistress, could ye tell me if there 's a weedy-wuman ca'd Mary Derrick bidin' up this stair?" he asked, addressing himself to the matron, who only shook her head.

"No that I ken o'. I 'm no lang here. My guidman 's been oot o' wark for twa month, or ye may be sure we wadna be bidin' in sic an ill hole," she answered, with a dignity which was quite out of keeping with her appearance.

"Eh, what does the man want, Kirsty?" queried another shrill-voiced virago, of strikingly similar appearance, emerging out of the dark recesses of the entry.

"He 's seekin' ane Mary Derrick," said Kirsty, elbowing aside to let her neighbour have half the doorway.

"Derrick, oo ay; a white-faced, genty kin' o' body, wi' ae bairn; is that the wuman ye 're seekin'?"

"Yes," said the miller, eagerly; "does she bide here yet?"

"No; she left nearly a month ago," said Jean, settling herself against the lintel, prior to giving and receiving news. "Ony freen'?"

"Yes, she's a relation o' mine," was all the satisfaction Thomas Dryburgh gave. "Can ye tell me onything aboot her?"

"Deed, very little; she wasna a neeborly body ava'," said Jean, with a toss of her head. "She cast her heid ower high. She micht be better nor the rest o' us, but she hadna muckle to show for't, and she was geyan hard up, when she couldna pay a shillin' a-week for the soothmost garret."

Thomas Dryburgh's face fell; was he indeed too late after all?

"Then ye canna tell me onything aboot her," he said, hopelessly.

"Naething, exceptin' that she's awa'," said Jean, looking as if she rather relished the answer she could make.

The miller turned rather dejectedly away from the door, but before he had gone many steps, a voice called him, and a thin weary-faced little woman, with a heavy baby in her arms, came up to him.

"I heard ye speirin' for Mrs. Derrick, sir," she said, in a quiet, listless voice, which made one think the spirit had been all knocked out of her. "I canna tell ye muckle aboot her; but I ken ae thing, her bairn's in the Children's Hospital oot at Parkside.

The minister's wife gied it in. Maybe they micht tell ye whaur the mither is."

Thomas Dryburgh's face brightened. "I'm certainly obleeged till ye, mistress. Whaur did ye say the place was?"

"Parkside. It 's a bittie frae here, but ye'll sune gang. May I mak' bold tae speir if ye are ony freen'? I often wondered wha she belanged tae. She wasna toon bred onyway. She took nae ill wi the Undergate. Ye see she was my neebor on the stair-heed, an' though we hadna muckle trock, she was the best an' kindest neebor I ever had, an' I was aye vext for her."

There were tears in the poor worn eyes of the weary mother as she uttered these words, and somehow the miller felt an unwonted dimness touch his own.

"I'm her brither, mistress," he said, readily enough. "Thenk ye for yer information. There 's something for the bairn."

As he spoke, he slipped a half-crown into the woman's hardened palm; a proceeding which was jealously noted by the two stout viragoes in the entry door, and who, thereupon, fell to abusing their meek-faced neighbour in no measured terms.

It was a good hour's walk from the Undergate to Parkside, so that it was about noon when Thomas Dryburgh reached *the gates* of the Children's Hospital.

How pleasant it was out here, he could not help thinking; what a grateful change from the miserable, squalid, unwholesome streets which fringed the river. The mist was fast disappearing under the genial rays of the sun, which shone brightly as usual on the windows of the Children's Home. If there was sun anywhere, it was sure to shine brightest and longest there; perhaps it loved the place. The miller felt some little hesitation as his fingers touched the shining bell handle; this was altogether a new experience for him, and he wondered at his own courage and perseverance.

A trim maid-servant promptly answered his summons, but as it was not the visitors' hour did not ask him to enter, but only waited to hear his business.

"Ye hae a bairn ca'd Derrick here, haven't ye, my lassie?" he said, bluntly.

The girl smiled slightly at the broad salutation. "I don't know, sir; but if you want to see any of the patients, the visiting hours are from two to six, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."

"Could I no' get in the day? I'm frae the country, an' it 's an important business."

"Well, come in, and I'll ask the matron to speak to you," said the girl, pleasantly; and ushering him into a little ante-room off the hall, left him to his own thoughts for a few minutes, then returned and requested him to follow her to the matron's room.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIBBIE.

"OOD morning, sir. You are asking for a child named Derrick, I think," said the matron, pleasantly, when the miller, red-faced and awkward looking, was ushered into her presence. She looked at him keenly, surmising that he was the brother of Mary Derrick, for Mrs. West had told her some, though not all, of the young widow's history.

"Yes, mem; I was telt she was here. But it's the mither I want mair parteeklerly to see. I'm her brither; my name is Thomas Dryburgh."

"We have the little one here; but we cannot take in the mothers as well, though some of them would fain stay," said the matron with a smile. "I am sorry I cannot tell you where Mrs. Derrick is to be found. I know she has left her old residence, and that the clergyman's wife who brought her and her baby here, has obtained a situation for her. But to-morrow is visiting day, and she never fails to put

in an appearance. If you could call about five, you would be quite certain to see her."

"Ye see, mem, I'm frae the country, an' I wad need to bide in Dunleith a' nicht in that case," said the miller, scratching his head.

"Well, I could give you the address of the clergyman's wife, who knows where your sister is," said the matron, kindly.

"Thenk ye; but I'll just bide till the morn," said the miller, who had faced quite enough strangers already. "I'm jist troublin' ye, bit if ye wad let me get a glint o' the bairn, I wad be muckle obleeged. Is she no' weel?"

"She was, but she is mending every day. The wards are in great confusion, for to-morrow is Christmas Day, you know, and we are having an entertainment for the children," said the matron. "But, I daresay, you won't mind."

Thomas Dryburgh had only a very vague idea of what a ward was, and certainly did not expect the sight which met his view, when, at the end of the long corridor, Mrs. Carnegie opened the door of the western ward and he saw the long, wide, high-ceiled room, with its row of dainty cots on either side; he looked overwhelmingly surprised.

"Bless me, what a heap o' bairns, an' what a braw place," he ejaculated. "It 'll tak' a mint o' money to keep up a place like this."

"Ay, it does, but we have always enough and to spare. Nobody grudges to give for such a purpose," said the matron. "Of course, you know it is kept up by voluntary subscriptions."

"No, I didna ken. Eh, there 's a white faced wee callant!" he said, looking compassionately at a little lad lying wearily back among his pillows, his face as white as they.

"Ay, poor Willie, he will never be well until he reaches the better Children's Home," whispered the matron softly. "Come and see your little niece, she is at the other end of the ward."

"This 'll be the Christmas tree for the morn?" said the miller, as they passed the big fir-tree, which was being decorated by such of the children as were able to be out of bed, while those in the cots looked on with eager interest.

"Yes, all these toys came in yesterday, free gifts from the Sabbath scholars in Dunleith," said the matron, pointing to two big hampers filled with all sorts of pretty things. "There are the same in the other three wards, so we will have a good time to-morrow. Here is your little niece. Well, Tibbie, how are you this morning? Are you going to speak to the gentleman who has come to see you?"

The fragile looking little girlie, sitting up in her cot with her golden curls falling like a halo above her little pink gown, smiled at the matron's kind

salutation, and gravely nodded her head in response.

"Shake hands with him, then," said Mrs. Carnegie, and instantly one pale, white hand was offered to the miller, who laid it on his own brown palm, and looked at it with a very curious expression on his face.

"Are ye verra no-weel, my dawtie?" he asked in a queer, husky voice.

"No, I'm better now," piped the shrill, sweet, childish voice. "Isn't this a nice place? See the Christmas tree."

How like to her fair mother she was when that smile, that eager look came upon her face! It seemed to Thomas Dryburgh that the years rolled backward, and he saw his baby sister playing about the Girnel, and himself a big uncouth halflin lad watching her with amused curiosity. And yet there was a look of her father about her too, a glint of the sunshine which made her doubly dear to her mother's heart.

"You see Tibbie is well cared for, and coming on nicely; in another month she will be running with the best of them," said Mrs. Carnegie. "Well, Mr. Dryburgh, I am afraid I must send you away, for it is just the children's dinner hour, and we will be in the way."

"A' richt. Guid-bye, Tibbie, lassie. D'ye ken

what a saxpence is?" he asked, producing a coin and laying it on the coverlet.

Ay, very well did Tibbie know what it was, and quickly enough did the little hand close over it, while a pleased smile touched the dainty lips.

"What do they pay for gettin' bairns in here, mem?" asked the miller, as he followed Mrs. Carnegie out of the ward.

"Nothing. It is a free institution for the benefit of the poor, kept up, as I told you, by voluntary subscription."

"D' ye say sae? There maun be an awfu' feck o' rich folk in Dunleith."

"There are some both rich and generous-hearted, but many of our most willing offerings come from poor folks who have been benefited by coming here."

"Ay, d' ye say sae? Can onybody gie that likes?"

"Certainly," answered the matron, with a smile.

"Wad ye tak a wheen bawbees frae the like o' me, na?"

"If you are so kind, try me and see," laughed the matron.

"I hinna muckle on me," said the miller, drawing out a handful of silver, and laying it on the hall table; "but I'll write oot a cheque afore I sleep, an' bring it the morn; for I never kent or heard o' onything *mair deservin' o'* support."

"I agree with you, Mr. Dryburgh. Anything you may be pleased to give will be gratefully accepted. Good morning. We will be pleased to see you to-morrow. I am sure you will enjoy seeing the children's treat. It is quite a sight."

So Thomas Dryburgh left the Children's Hospital, with his eyes opened to several things of which he had never dreamed before.

He occupied the rest of the day in hunting up several old acquaintances, who, as lads, had left quiet Balwhinnie to seek a wider sphere in the town. One of these lads, now a prosperous merchant, was so delighted to see a face from his native hills, that though he had not been particularly friendly with Thomas Dryburgh when they were boys together at Balwhinnie, he insisted on taking him out to his comfortable and even luxurious home in the suburbs, where a gentle-eyed wife and a troop of happy children made the sunshine of his life. And when he heard that business would keep the miller in Dunleith till next day, he would not hear of him spending the night at an hotel, and when the sweet wife added her kind words of invitation, Thomas Dryburgh was prevailed upon; so the evening was spent in the cosy dining-room, amid all the blithe chatter and quiet mirth found only in a truly happy home.

"What d'ye think o' my bairns, Tam?" said the merchant, when the two were left sitting by the fire

GENTLE-EYED WIFE AND A GROUP OF HAPPY CHILDREN."

after supper. "Doesn't it say a guid deal for daft Jamie Colquhoun that he has a hame like this, an' sic a wife, eh?" There was a twinkle in his eyes as he spoke; but the glow of a deeper feeling mingled with it.

"Ay, man," was all the miller made answer, for his heart was filled by a thousand vague longings and unavailing regrets which were like to overwhelm him. Here was one, the son of a poor widow in Balwhinnie, who, by dint of his own unaided exertions, and the exercise of the manly qualities of heart and head, had risen to a position of influence and happiness, while he, Thomas Dryburgh, who had been a rich man all his days, and that without any exertion of his own, was a mere cipher, whose existence had never benefited a human being. When the day came to balance accounts in the Great Hall of Judgment, with what words would he answer the accusing voice of the Master, when the intrusted talents were brought unused out of the napkin wherein he had so selfishly hid them?

"So ye 've never mairrit, Tam," said the merchant, speaking in the broad dialect he loved, though it was seldom heard in the society in which he moved; "man, ye 've missed a heap. There 's nae life like it. But for my wife, God bless her, I wadna hae been whaur I am the day. An' the bairns are the very glint o' *the sun itsel'*."

"Ay, man," said the miller again, and his head fell upon his hands.

The merchant looked at him compassionately, guessing something of what was passing in his heart. He knew his greed of gold; knew, too, the story of Mary Dryburgh and her somewhat sad marriage, and, in the silence which ensued, a prayer rose silently from the good man's heart, that Thomas Dryburgh's remorse might bear its fruit.

"I think I'll gang to my bed, Jamie," said the miller, rising somewhat heavily to his feet, and passing his hand wearily across his brow. "The morn, maybe, I'll tell ye my errand to Dunleith. Man, be thankfu' ye are what ye are, an' no a meeserable useless cratur' siccan as me. Guid nicht."

In the night Mrs. Colquhoun awoke her husband, saying there was some one speaking in the adjoining room, which was the guest-chamber, occupied by Thomas Dryburgh.

"It's the voice of prayer, my dear," said the merchant. "The Spirit of God is wrestling with the man, let us pray that He may prevail."

CHAPTER IX.

A HAPPY ENDING.

IT snowed on Christmas morning; and when the little ones awoke, thinking rapturously of all the glories in store, the sun was up, and the delicate fringe beginning to disappear from the boughs of the big elm tree which nodded in at the long windows of the western ward. What a bustle it was all forenoon getting each face and each pair of hands washed, each little head brushed smooth and straight, and each small figure attired in a new, bright-coloured night-dress, the gift of a kind lady in the town, all to do honour to Father Christmas, and to the dear friends who had done so much to make it bright and pleasant for the suffering children shut out from the pleasures attendant upon youth and health. But for the time aches and pains were almost forgotten (though there *were* one or two poor wee mortals too sorely stricken even to be roused by Christmas cheer), and when the long *shadows of the* early twilight began to fall,

the nurses stepped about briskly, lighting a gas-lamp here and another there, though the full brilliance of light, when the taper should be put to the candles and little lanterns on the tree itself, was reserved until the visitors began to arrive.

Among the first to enter the western ward was Mary Derrick; the lady who, on Mrs. West's recommendation, had engaged her to help in her house until the busy festive season should be past, having kindly given her the afternoon to visit her sick child. A few weeks' pure air and good food, coupled with relief from anxiety and care, had already made a marked improvement in Mary Derrick. Her step was lighter and freer, her eyes brighter, and her cheeks even had gained a little of the bloom they had lost. The nurses and the children, who knew her well now, wished her "A Merry Christmas" as she passed up the ward, a greeting which she returned with that sweet, ready smile which made her face so pleasant to look at; and in another moment she was at Tibbie's bedside, clasping the dear wee figure in her arms, and feasting her motherly eyes on the sweet, bonnie face which was her only earthly treasure. What an unutterable joy it was to Mary Derrick to watch the gradual improvement in her darling, and how deep and true was the gratitude in her heart I cannot tell you. She had vowed again and again in her inmost heart

that every penny she could save from her wages should be laid aside for the purpose of paying her debt to the Children's Hospital. She looked upon the benefits Tibbie had received as a loan to herself, to be paid back by slow degrees perhaps, but still as scrupulously and honourably as any ordinary debt. There was not one atom of meanness nor of selfishness in Mary Derrick's heart.

"See my sixpence, mother," said Tibbie, exhibiting with childish glee the shining coin she had received from the stranger on the previous day.

'Ay; an' whaur did Tibbie get that?" asked the fond mother, as her hand wandered to and fro caressingly on the bairn's golden head.

"The kind man that came yesterday," said the sweet, childish tones. "An' I telled him to look at the Christmas tree, mother."

"Ay, well, my lamb, Tibbie 'll keep the sixpence till the bonnie days when she can rin again," said Mary Derrick caressingly, thinking one of the many friends of the Children's Hospital had been paying a Christmas visit to the inmates. At that moment one of the nurses touched her arm.

"There's somebody wishing to see you downstairs, Mrs. Derrick. A gentleman, Mrs. Carnegie told me to say. He is in the little waiting-room off the hall, *and you are to* go down at once."

Mary Derrick rose to her feet, looking somewhat surprised.

"To see me! are ye sure it 's me?"

The nurse nodded, and went off again, for the visitors were beginning to drop into the ward, and the pleasant clatter of tea-cups was going on at the other end.

"There 's somebody wantin' to see mother, Tibbie, but she 'll no bide lang," said Mrs. Derrick, and with a smiling nod to the bairn, she left the ward, and took her way down the now familiar stairs, wondering much who could be seeking an interview with her.

The thought that by any possibility it might be her brother never for a moment entered her mind. She supposed that they were parted to meet no more, at least this side the grave.

She opened unhesitatingly the door of the little ante-room, in which a cheery fire relieved the gloom of the wintry afternoon. Even when she saw the tall stalwart figure in grey home-spun, standing on the hearth, with its back to the door, she did not recognise it.

"Ye wished to see me, sir?" she said, closing the door, and advancing into the room. Then the figure slowly turned, and her startled eyes beheld the face of her brother, Thomas Dryburgh.

"Tam!" she exclaimed faintly. Is 't you or yer ghost?"

"It 's me, Mary," returned he in tremulous husky tones. "Oh, lassie, my een 's been opened, though late, to my sin, an' I hae come to see if ye can ever forgi'e me. I ken I dinna deserve it, but if ye could, Mary, I 'd mak' it up to you, I wad indeed, baith to you an' to the bairn."

"Oh, Tam, Tam!" fell brokenly from Mary Derrick's lips, and sitting down at the table, she leaned her head on her hands, and burst into tears. Her brother moved nearer to her, and looked down upon her with humble beseeching eyes. How changed she was, from the winsome lassie of long ago, and yet how he loved her, the sister against whom he had steeled his heart so long!

"I hae been a puir, meeserable, hard-hearted, sinfu' wretch a' my days, Mary," he went on in the same low self-accusing tones. "I hae wranged ye, lassie, an' keepit the siller which wad hae stood between you an' want. But it 's a' safe in the bank, Mary, beside my ain, an' it shall be a' yours an' the bairn's, if ye 'll only forgi'e me, an' come hame to the Girnel.

"I dinna deserve that ye should forgi'e me, Mary, but the Almichty, whom I hae sinned against continually a' thae years, has forgi'en me, an' gi'en peace an' pardon an' hope to my heart. Wull ye, Mary?"

The miller's voice had sunk almost to a whisper now, *and as he ceased* speaking, his trembling hand

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fell upon his sister's drooping shoulder, with a touch of yearning love. For the dear tie of kinship was between them, and he had been lonely and miserable so long. But no answer came, except the sound of weeping in the quiet room, as if Mary Derrick's overcharged heart must spend itself in tears, or break.

"I daurna think on what ye hae suffert, Mary, for it gars me despair o' ever bein' able to mak' my atonement. But if ye'll only come, I'll try. I'll jist be like a bairn in yer hands, for I maun begin at the very beginnin' an' falter along the road ye hae walkit a' yer days.

"But if, mindin' on the puir life ye had at the Girnel wi' me afore, ye canna think to come," he continued, when still no answer came to his pleading, "ye'll let me set ye up in a comfortable hoose, an' see that the siller's a' richt invested for you and the bairn. It'll keep you an' her in comfort a' yer days."

Then Mary Derrick started up; and oh, how beautiful was the smile which shone so radiantly through her tears!

"Oh, Tam! Tam! dinna say ony mair! what can I say but that Tibbie an me'll come to the Girnel, ay, an' that we'll be blithe to come; and we'll live canty an cosy thegither a' oor days!"

"Thank the Lord!" fell fervently from Thomas *Dryburgh's* lips, and then a hushed silence fell upon

them, for there came floating down to them the sweet glad strains of the Christmas hymn they were singing upstairs.

"Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good-will to men."

Ay, it was a happy, happy Christmas day!

* * * * *

One more peep, only one, we must have into the Girnel kitchen on a sunshiny summer afternoon. Oh, what a sight it was, what a bright, cheerful, cosy place, what a home! No cobwebs now, no dim tins and discoloured brasses, no grimy floor, and ash-choked bars, no, no! Though you looked till your eyes grew tired, you could not discover a speck of dust or a single spot to blemish the perfect cleanliness of the Girnel kitchen. And then, though it was the summer time, what a clear, bright, inviting fire crackled in the shining grate, and how the kettle sang, as if vieing with the clear notes of the canary, Tibbie's last fairing from Uncle Tom, when he had been at Dunleith market. Then, what a delicious odour of new-made tea, and buttered toast, and home-made scones and cakes, with which the big table was groaning! About the table flitted the dear mistress of the Girnel, a sweet-faced gentle-eyed woman to whom the bloom of early beauty has returned again. Ay, Mary Derrick was a happy woman now, and there was only at times a glimmer

of thoughtfulness a passing shadow which recalled the burdened past. After all, we cannot *quite* forget. Presently the sweet shrill tones of a child's voice came sounding in through the open door, and a chubby rosy-cheeked wee maiden, with her hands filled with buttercups, came toddling in, followed by a substantial, well-dressed, comely figure marvellously like that of Nancy Thorburn. And so it was; for since the new reign had begun at the Girnel, there were many comings and goings between it and Leerie Law.

"Guid day t'ye, Mary. Am I late? It's no easy gaun tea-drinkin' wi' sae mony beasts to look efter. I spent a guid hoor efter I was dressed huntin' a clockin' hen. They're perfect pests," she said laughing. "What a pet that bairn o' yours is! She was ower Balwhinnie Brae puin' buttercups an' lookin' for me."

"Ay, ye see Tibbie never saw them growin' by the roadsides afore;" answered Mary, with a smile and a tear; and while she ushered her visitor into the bedroom to take off her bonnet, Tibbie ran off to find her uncle and bring him in to tea. The women folk stayed so long chatting, after the manner of their kind, that when they again entered the kitchen the miller was in his seat at the table, with the bairn perched on her high chair beside him. It *was an amusing* and yet a touching thing to see the

"PULIN' BUTTERCUPS AN' LOOKIN' FOR ME."

grey-haired man and the sunny-haired child so utterly devoted to each other. Mary would laugh sometimes, and say she was jealous of the love the bairn had for her uncle; but that was only in jest.

A hearty greeting passed between the miller and the mistress of Leerie Law. The past, though not forgotten, was laid aside, although a joke was sometimes passed about the miller's first visit to Leerie Law, of which Mary had received a comical account from her brother.

"Oh, this fireside 's a sicht for sair een, neebor," said Nancy, looking round with glistening eyes. "I never thocht to see the like in the Girnel."

"Nor I, Nancy," said the miller, and his brown hand fell caressingly on Tibbie's golden head.

"Them that lives langest sees maist, they say," said Nancy blithely. "What d' ye say, Mary?"

But Mary's answer was not audible. She smiled upon them all, and when she stepped back to set the teapot at the fire, she whispered to herself very low, "But with God all things are possible."

And then the merry meal began.

* * * * *

I have only to add that Mary Derrick's debt to the Children's Hospital has been long since paid,—ay, *over and above*. At Christmas time two cheques are regularly despatched from the Girnel, and a big hamper as well, in which are packed the

freshest eggs and the most delicious butter and the fattest chickens the Girnel can produce; in the sending of which Thomas Dryburgh himself is more deeply interested than any one else. And, in the old-fashioned bureau, which stands in his own bedroom, there is to be found a blue document, the counterpart of that lying in a solicitor's office in Dunleith, which is marked "Thomas Dryburgh's Will." There is one bequest set forth in that document which we may mention, though it is a breach of professional confidence. This clause ensures that after Thomas Dryburgh's death the greater part of his hoarded gold shall go to the endowment of two cots in the Children's Hospital in Dunleith, to be marked, "The gift of an anonymous donor, out of gratitude for great mercy vouchsafed."

So the dream bore its fruit, and proved one of the greatest blessings of Thomas Dryburgh's life.

THE END.

MISS BAXTER'S BEQUEST.

"*Listen*, girls, while I read this letter."—p. 11.

MISS BAXTER'S BEQUEST

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN
(MRS. BURNETT SMITH)
AUTHOR OF "ALDERSYDE;" "A DIVIDED HOUSE;"
"THE GUINEA STAMP," ETC., ETC.

NEW EDITION

EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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MISS BAXTER'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVITATION.

THE first time Miss Baxter's name fell upon my ears was when I was a young woman, at home in my father's manse of Ardstruan. Although that is nearly half-a-century ago, I remember that winter afternoon as well as if it had been but yesterday. We were alone in the dining-room of the manse, my mother, my sister Lindsay, and I, who was anxiously examining an old silk cloak which had pertained to our maternal grandmother, whose wardrobe had lately become the property of us two Hepburn girls.

"Our grandmother Forbes must have been of a very saving turn of mind, mother," said I; "for all her clothes are threadbare to the last degree."

"And what was your inventive brain thinking to make out of grandmother's mantle?" asked mother, looking up from her knitting with a smile.

"*Listen*, girls, while I read this letter."—p. 11.

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unlike him, but I had ever been considered a plain substantial kind of person, more for use than ornament. As I was in my twenty-sixth year, and no suitor had ever come to the manse for me, they said too that I should be the old maid of the family. I was very well content that it should be so, and in no way jealous or envious of my sister's beautiful face. She was a Forbes, and that family had ever been famed for the loveliness of its women folk.

"Father has been at the post-office, and the mail is in, for he is carrying something in his hand," I said, as I turned from the window, and went to get the lamp from the sideboard.

Lindsay jumped up.

"I *hope* there will be a letter from Cousin George to say he is coming again!" the bairn exclaimed; and I smiled to myself, knowing that the sojourn of our Edinburgh cousin with us last New Year time had been a very pleasant season for her. Then I took the tea-caddy and went away to the kitchen to see whether Marjory had the kettle boiling. I had to wait a few minutes, I remember, and when I returned to the dining-room father was taking off his boots at the fire-side. I stooped down and unlaced them for him, and got him his warm slippers from their corner on the fender.

"Have you had a nice walk? Is it not very cold?" mother asked.

"Yes, dear, bitterly so. We shall have half-a-foot of

snow before morning, or I am mistaken," answered father, stretching out his chilled fingers to the cheery blaze.

"Are there any letters, papa? do let us see them," said Lindsay coaxingly. A smile touched for a moment father's grave lips, and he slowly put his hand into his breast pocket.

"I know what you want, pussy. Yes, there is one from that mischievous lad," he said, handing Lindsay her anxiously-expected letter. "There is one for you too, Magdalen, from Glenbuich I think; and now, my dear," he said, leaning forward and looking into mother's sweet face, "do you think you could guess who I have a letter from to-day?"

Mother shook her head.

"I am not a good guesser," she answered, smiling too. "Is it from a *very* unlikely person?"

"Very. Susan Baxter of Broadlands." Mother sat up suddenly, so great was her surprise.

"What has she to say to you, Robert?" she asked in such a queer voice that I stopped the perusal of my own letter (only an invitation from Aunt Stuart Forbes to spend a few days at Glenbuich) to listen for father's answer.

"Listen, girls, while I read this letter," father said, and Lindsay very reluctantly took her eyes from the closely-written sheet upon which she was intent, and tried to give father her attention.

"BROADLANDS,
SELKIRKSHIRE, 22*nd Nov.*, 18—.

"DEAR ROBERT,—Although you have not heard from me for a long time, I am still alive, and in as good health as a woman come to my time of life can expect to be. Very likely you have forgotten my age. I was sixty-nine last month. I have often thought I should like to see your girls—I hear you have two; and I write to see if you will send one to stay for a while with me, perhaps till spring. I am not so able to go about as I was, and I am very dull sometimes in this lonely house. Perhaps you will wonder why I ask for one of your girls, but the Olivers, who used to come about Broadlands, are all married and away. As for the Pringles of Honeyburn, they are near enough—neither of them married, nor likely to be—but they are women I could never bide. I want you to send whichever of your girls is the most sensible and staid; keep the pretty one at home, because she would fret her life out here. Of course I will bear all the expense; and if your daughter can content herself a while with an old woman, she will find it worth her while. I don't say this to tempt you: you won't grudge me what I ask, for auld lang syne. With best respects to yourself and your wife, whom I have never seen, I am, yours sincerely,

SUSAN BAXTER."

"What a strange letter," said mother musingly.

"It is very characteristic of the woman who penned it," said father, and looked at me.

"It is interesting," was all I said, and looked at Lindsay; but she had no comment to make, having resumed the perusal of what to her was of more moment than Miss Baxter's blunt effusion.

"What is to be said about it, mother?" asked father presently; but mother only smiled and looked at me.

"It is for Magdalen to say," she said at length. "The invitation is for her."

"We can talk it over after, mother," I said. "But I don't see how I can leave home at this time of year—with the school-treat and the congregational soiree and the New Year so near at hand. What does George say, Lindsay?"

"He is coming on the 22nd, he says," answered Lindsay, her cheeks all aglow; "and he wants to know whether father and mother have any objections to him bringing a friend with him,—a college chum, Walter Inglis. His father was Dr. Inglis of Humbie Parish," added Lindsay, looking appealingly at father.

"Ay, I knew his father well. He was a fine man. Of course the lads can both come; write and tell them so," said father absently. "Well, my daughter, is tea ready?"

Father always said "my daughter" to me, never to Lindsay. She was his pet, his bairn, his lassie, and a

dozen other endearing terms, but I was "his daughter," and somehow, though it was never expressed in words, I knew I was more to my father than Lindsay was; perhaps it was natural, for I had been his right-hand companion since the days when, a little merry child, I sat proudly in front of him when he rode over hill and dale on the shaggy back of Shetland Donald, who had long since been gathered to his fathers.

Tea was ready, and we gathered about the table, and there was no more said about Miss Baxter's letter. But it was much in my head, and I saw that father was very absent-minded, as if his thoughts had travelled back to the days of his early youth.

After tea he went away to his study, for it was Friday night, which was always devoted to uninterrupted study for the Sabbath day. Lindsay ran singing to the parlour to write her letter to George, and I turned to mother with a smile, and said that the bairn seemed just bound up in our Edinburgh cousin. Mother smiled too, well pleased like, for George Dunsyre was as dear to her as a son of her own could be, and indeed everybody loved him, he was so frank and kind and true, and so clever with it all. He was not really our cousin, for his mother had only been a first cousin of our mother's, but he was always proud and fond to call mother Aunt Margaret, and us two *girls his* cousins.

"*Mother,* who is Susan Baxter? and why have we

never heard of her before?" I asked in my blunt way, drawing in my chair beside mother.

"She is a cousin of your father's, my dear, and——"

"And what?"

"I suppose I may tell you. She expected to marry your Uncle Donald, and because he took one of the Miss Pringles she has never been friends either with your father or them again."

"How strange! I should think she should be very glad now that she didn't marry Uncle Donald," said I musingly, for I was old enough to know a little of Uncle Donald's ne'er-do-weel life. He had been a banker in Edinburgh, but owing to his bad behaviour had lost his position and broken the heart of his wife, the gentle Aunt Agnes, whom as a child I had almost worshipped. She was dead now, and so was Uncle Donald, and yet this Miss Baxter seemed to keep up bitterness in her soul against those who had been connected with him or with his wife.

"Are these Pringles of Honeyburn Aunt Agnes's relatives?" I asked, with interest.

"Yes; her two sisters, maiden ladies, I believe, are still living there. Delightful women they are. Your father has often spoken of them. What is to be said about your going?"

"Can we afford it, mother?" I asked, for it was a long and expensive journey. And yet there was in my soul a strange unaccountable yearning to see with my

own eyes the mystic charms of Ettrick, Tweed, and Yarrow—names I had long loved in song and story.

"I would like to afford it," said mother. "I have often thought I would like my girls to see something outside the walls of a Scotch manse, a little more of the world than that bounded by the limits of a Highland parish, and I think your father would like you to go."

For a few days there was no more said about Miss Baxter's letter, except when it was occasionally mentioned between Lindsay my sister and me. But the bairn had little interest in it, being so taken up with the coming of our Cousin George on the Monday. Father asked me if I had duly weighed the letter and its contents.

"Would you desire me to go, father?" I asked.

"Not against your wish, my daughter; but your mother and I both think it would be a pleasant change for you; and when would such a chance of seeing the south come to you again?"

"Very well, father, I will get ready," I said; and somehow I was well pleased that it was so decided. So I set to work to put my wardrobe in order, and after overhauling grandmother's wardrobe I made myself a gown for evening wear out of a crimson brocade silk. After it was made and trimmed, I thought it too gay for a sober young woman like me, but mother and Lindsay declared it perfect; and when I put it on to let father see it, he looked surprised, and said I looked like a

land princess. So busy was I, that in less than a
I was quite ready to go; and on the Monday
ing I bade them all good-bye with a heavy heart,
had a strange prevision that I was taking a serious
in life. I was not afraid, for I knew that the God
had kept me safe and happy in my father's home
d be with me to guide and shield me among the
gers to whom I was going. I just felt like
ham setting out for a strange land, not knowing
ıer he was bound, but yet abiding in faith and
fastness upon the promise, knowing no fear,
ıse of the hope and faith that was in him. So it
vith me; and with my father's blessing upon me,
:he sure confidence that God would care for and
ct me upholding my somewhat sorrowful heart,
an my journeyings to my new home.

CHAPTER II.

MY WELCOME.

I ARRIVED in Edinburgh about half-past ten at night, very weary and dull, and glad was I to see the frank kindly face of Cousin George peering in at the carriage window.

"Hulloa, Magdalen! tired out, eh?" he said, in his boyish, cheery fashion. "Here, let me help you out. I'll see to all your traps. This is my friend Inglis; Walter, my cousin, Miss Hepburn."

I looked curiously at George's friend before I shook hands with him, then I smiled and said I was glad to meet him, for he was just such another as George himself.

"I have a commission from my mother, Miss Hepburn that you will accept the shelter of her roof-tree for the night," said Mr. Inglis. "She would have come to meet you herself, only she is suffering from severe cold."

"I'd advise you to go, Magdalen," said George "Jolly good cheer Mrs. Inglis will give you, I can tel you. She's as much my mother as Walter's. I nearly

live there, so you needn't be afraid; and you wouldn't like hotel accommodation."

"Mrs. Inglis is truly kind, and I will gladly accept her invitation," I said thankfully, for, truth to tell, the thought of spending a night in an hotel had rather dismayed me. Since Uncle Donald's death we had neither relative nor friend in Edinburgh but George himself, and he was in lodgings. He had been commissioned to engage a room for me at an hotel, but had not done so, in the hope that I would accept the hospitality of his friend's mother. We got into a cab then, and drove rapidly through the streets out to a suburb called the Grange; and shortly we drew up at a garden gate, and when I got out I saw a pretty house standing in its own grounds, and in a very few minutes I was welcomed into its warmth and comfort by that dear woman Mrs. Inglis, whom I was long proud and glad to call my friend.

"My dear, I am a minister's widow, and you are a minister's daughter, so we are friends," she said, taking my hands in hers. "I could not possibly allow Magdalen Hepburn to go to an hotel when I had a shelter to offer her. I remember your father quite well; and besides, George has made your name and your sister's household words among us."

After that, who would not feel at home? I never experienced so much kindness from strangers in my life, and I assure you I lay down in my bed that night

with a grateful and hopeful heart, for my welcom Edinburgh was like a promise that my pilgrimag the south and my sojourning there would be ple and happy.

Dear Mrs. Inglis was most urgent for me to re a few days with her, and the lads anxious to sho Edinburgh, but Miss Baxter was expecting me ear the day. However, I was persuaded to telegraph I would not leave till three o'clock in the after so we had time for a delightful drive through l burgh, with which I was quite enchanted. though I have travelled much since then, and seer most lovely cities in Europe, I have never seer marrow of our beautiful Edinburgh, "grey metrop though it be.

The lads took me to the station and put me s into the train, and also made me clear about rer bering to change at Galashiels for Selkirk.

"Good-bye, cousin Magdalen. May you be ha said George in his mischievous way; "only I quite forgive you for leaving Ardstruan when knew we were coming. Who 'll bake scones dumplings to equal yours?"

The train moved away before I could answer, so a smile and a nod I settled myself in my corner fixed my thoughts upon what awaited me at Sel I also looked with interest on the landscape thr which the train was speeding. It looked very

turesque, for the rich brown furrows of the newly-ploughed land showed well against the stubble. I was astonished at the green freshness of the lea, and to see brown and yellow leaves still upon the boughs. Even the hedges in some sheltered nooks were green; evidently winter did not so soon hold the earth in icy chains as I was accustomed to see it in my northern home. The air of the December afternoon was so mild and pleasant that I could afford to strap up my plaid, which had done me such good service on my journey of yesterday. Dusk had fallen when the train stopped at Galashiels, which seemed to be a manufacturing town, as I saw many tall chimneys showing sharply against the clear sky. I had not many minutes to wait till we were off again, and now my heart began to beat a little quicker, for I was coming very near indeed to my destination. It is a very lonesome feeling arriving in the dark at a strange place, and I began to think what should I do if nobody came to meet me. I got out at Selkirk, and having seen all my traps safely landed on the platform I stood rather disconsolately beside them with a dreary feeling of isolation and dread in my heart. Just then I saw a woman's figure attired in a long black cloak bustling along the platform. Her face was veiled, but if that common-place uninteresting-looking figure pertained to Miss Baxter I was grievously disappointed. She came directly towards me, however, and put up her

thick veil. "Miss Hepburn, ma'am," she said, with a very broad accent, "I am Miss Baxter's maid; will you please come with me?"

"Thank you," I said, with a sigh of relief, and lifting my handbag I left the porter to follow with my portmanteau and travelling basket, and accompanied Miss Baxter's maid out of the station. There was only one vehicle outside, a carriage and pair of greys, and what was my astonishment when my companion opened the door and requested me to enter. I did so, and sank back among the soft cushions, which were all covered in spotless holland, sure sign that the owner of the carriage was of a careful and thrifty nature. It was a great surprise to me to learn that Miss Baxter drove a carriage and pair, and I began to wonder how I, the plain daughter of a country manse, should comport myself if the other equipments of Broadlands were equal in grandeur to the carriage.

"Is it far to Broadlands?" I asked, turning to my companion.

"Seven miles up the Yarrow, ma'am," was the respectful answer, and at mention of Yarrow my heart thrilled. "Miss Baxter would have come herself, but she never goes out at nights."

"Is she very frail?" I asked.

"Middlin' for her years," was the answer given, a little sadly I thought, but probably my companion had *been with* her mistress for many years. There was

little more said, and though Miss Baxter's carriage was delightfully cosy and warm I was not sorry when we came to a stand-still at the entrance to Broadlands. Looking out I saw that the approach was guarded by a massive stone gateway, and that there was a quaint little lodge within its precincts, from the front window of which a bright light shone out pleasantly upon the darkness of the night.

It was not a long avenue, for in the space of three or four minutes we stopped again, and my companion got out and then assisted me to alight. I looked with some curiosity and not a little timidity upon Miss Baxter's dwelling, but in the darkness I could only see that it seemed a long, low building, apparently in the architecture of a bygone day. The front door was open, and I walked into the wide hall, which, with its quaint oak panellings and polished floor, was quite a sight in itself.

"Miss Baxter said I was to show you to your rooms, ma'am," said a pleasant-featured quiet-voiced maid-servant coming towards me. "Will you please to walk upstairs?"

I assented, and followed the girl upstairs. Perhaps I thought my welcome a little cold; but doubtless people in Miss Baxter's position stood more upon ceremony than we simple Highland folk. I found my rooms the very picture of comfort and luxury combined. There was a fine large bedroom and a delightful

dressing-room opening off it, and both were warmed and lighted by blazing fires. The girl set down my portmanteau and asked if she could wait upon me. I smiled and thanked her. I was accustomed to wait upon myself.

"I will tap at your door in half-an-hour, Miss Hepburn," she said then; "dinner is to be served at half-past six."

When she withdrew I sat down rather helplessly, a little overwhelmed with everything, for how could I, plain Magdalen Hepburn, accustomed to the quiet ways of a country manse, ever feel at home among the formalities of this grand house? However, now that I had come, it behoved me to make the best of it, so I opened my basket, took out my brown merino which had been bought for this visit, and proceeded to make my toilet. I was never one who spent much time or thought on my clothes, but I did think as I put on my fine lace collar that I had never had so neat and well-fitting a gown on before, nor one which became me so well. I was just ready when the tap came, and I found the maid ready to escort me downstairs. She opened the drawing-room door, waited to see me enter, and then withdrew. I saw nothing in the room except the figure on the hearth—that tall, spare, yet stately figure; my eyes were riveted by the face—that poor, *proud, patient* face, which seemed to tell its tale of *disappointment* and heart-sickness and weariness of

self and of all the world. The delicate white hands were both outstretched in greeting to me, and a smile smoothed away for a moment all the hard lines upon the brow and about the firm sad mouth.

"Magdalen Hepburn," said Miss Baxter, and her voice shook, "you are welcome, thrice welcome, to Broadlands."

I am not a demonstrative woman, I do not kiss and make a fuss even over those dearest to me, that is not my way, but I felt so suddenly and strongly moved that night, that, still clasping the thin slender hands, I raised my head and kissed Miss Baxter's cheek—I had to raise my head though I am not a little woman, for Miss Baxter was considerably taller than I.

"You would have a long tiresome journey," she said, and slightly turned away. "You must be fatigued and hungry. Let us go to the dining-room; I fancy dinner will be served." She offered me her arm. I smiled as I took it, for it struck me as very comical that we should go downstairs arm in arm. What fun Cousin George would have made of it! I was hungry, and did ample justice to the delicious cookery of Broadlands. We did not talk very much in the presence of the maid. Miss Baxter asked several questions about our home life and parish work, which I answered in my plain straightforward way. I noticed that Miss Baxter ate little or nothing; I noticed too, now that the little flush of excitement had passed away, that she had

grown deadly pale. I wondered if that was the habitual colour of her face. Also her eyes gleamed restlessly, as if there was inward pain. I had thought her youthful-looking upstairs, but now she looked her age to the full. But she was still a handsome and most ladylike woman.

After dinner we returned to the drawing-room, and sat down, one upon either side of the hearth.

"You are very like your father, Magdalen," said Miss Baxter.

"So people say, and so I am glad to believe," I answered. "My sister is my mother's image, and is very beautiful."

"Was your mother beautiful?" Miss Baxter asked.

"She was a Forbes of Glenbuich, and they are famous for beauty, Miss Baxter," I answered. "My mother is the handsomest woman in the parish."

"Were you quite willing to come here, Magdalen?" was Miss Baxter's next unexpected question.

"Quite; and both father and mother were very anxious for me to come," I replied frankly.

"It will be very dull for you; I keep no company with my neighbours," said Miss Baxter, and her voice took a harder tone. "I told you so, I think, when I wrote."

"Yes. I shall not be dull. I am a quiet, easily-*contented* person, Miss Baxter," I said cheerfully.

"*So was* I at your age," said the old lady in the

same still hard way. "But the world has used me hardly. Friends I trusted in have failed me, those from whom I expected most have given me least. You find me now a desolate, miserable old woman, who has proved life to be nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit." She spoke with bitterness that was almost passion, and the worn eyes gleamed with a brightness I did not like to see.

"Dear Miss Baxter," I said, speaking very gently, for my heart was sore for her, "it grieves me to hear you speak so bitterly. Surely there are some kind, true hearts in the world yet."

"None for me," she said fiercely. "They came fawning upon me for what I had, and when I did not give lavishly enough they left me with bitter words on their tongue. Where money is, there can be no right feeling between kindred. It is the root of contention and bitterness, it poisons truth and saps the affections of the heart; ay, money is an evil thing."

"Not so, only the abuse of it is evil," I maintained stoutly. "Money is a good and precious gift if used aright, the lack of it saps the springs of hope and youthfulness in many hearts."

Miss Baxter looked surprised, and her lips parted in a grim smile.

"I like that; you have an opinion of your own and can stick to it, bairn," she said. "You are like your father in more ways than one." I laughed and looked

towards the spindle-legged pianoforte in the corner. Both Lindsay and I were musical—indeed singing was my sole accomplishment.

"Do you play, Miss Baxter?"

"I? no, not these many years; you may open the instrument if you like." I rose and crossed the room and lifted the lid. The keys were worn and yellow—I doubted much if there could be any melody left in them. However, at touch of my fingers they gave forth a sweet if rather tinkling sound. Then I sang "The Rowan Tree." It was my father's favourite, and through long practice I had learned to sing it well, to give expression to every feeling of the pathetic words. So absorbed was I that I was oblivious of everything around me; when the echo of the last refrain died away in the room I looked round, and to my astonishment found myself alone. I saw Miss Baxter no more that night.

CHAPTER III.

A PROUD HEART.

I WAS downstairs before eight o'clock next morning, and found breakfast laid in the library, a small but cosy room, where a cheery bit fire brightened the grey morning gloom. I walked away over to the window, and stood looking out with interested and delighted eyes. Truly it was a goodly and pleasant land to which I had come.

Right in front of the house was the close smooth-shaven lawn, round which the avenue swept in a graceful curve. Beyond that the somewhat thinly-wooded park sloped down to the road, which ran parallel with the river. The sun was just rising in the soft grey sky, and a subdued brightness touched the windings of the stream till it shone like a thread of gold. That must be Yarrow, thought I, and again my heart thrilled. Upon the opposite side of the river rose a mighty hill crowned with silver birch and glossy pine to its very summit. The shadow lay upon it yet, and it seemed to frown upon the meander-

ing of the gentle stream. Turning my eyes to the right, I beheld through the trees the grey towers and turrets of another house, standing upon a little knoll, a most picturesque situation, and evidently an ancient picturesque building. Just then Miss Baxter entered the room, and I turned to greet her. She looked even more haggard and ill in the clear morning light, and the folds of her plain morning gown hung loosely about her wasted frame.

"I hope you slept?" she said, looking inquiringly into my face. I said I had, and expressed my regret at seeing her look so far spent.

"I have had to breakfast in bed this winter for the first time," she said, "but now that you have come I must bestir myself. It is not good for man or woman to dwell so utterly alone as I have done these past five years. The mind becomes too much occupied with self, and imagination is allowed to run riot. Bring your chair to the table; we will wait upon ourselves. It has never been my habit to have serving-women about me at meal times, except on rare occasions."

"It will be a relief to me, Miss Baxter," said I. "For my part, I would much rather wait upon myself and you too while I am here."

"Your father has trained you well. Come, make *out the tea*, then. At my time of life it becomes a *pleasure* to sit idle and see others work."

I readily took my place behind the urn, for I always presided at the tea-table at home.

"What a beautiful countryside this is, Miss Baxter; I have been feasting my eyes upon it for the last ten minutes. Tell me, is that Yarrow flowing down there?"

"That is Yarrow," answered my hostess briefly.

"And, Miss Baxter, what lovely old house is that beyond the trees on the right?"

"That is Wolflee, the family seat of the Olivers," answered Miss Baxter, briefly as before.

"The Olivers; do you know them?" I asked, all unconscious that I was treading on dangerous ground.

"Did I not tell you, Magdalen Hepburn, that I had no dealings with my neighbours?" she asked harshly. "Wait till we have breakfasted, and I will point out the different places to you, so that you may not trouble me with any more questions."

Not a little discomfited I devoted myself to my breakfast, and said no more.

When we had finished, Miss Baxter walked over to the window and desired me to join her there. I did so, and raising her hand she pointed with her thin finger down the road leading to the left.

"That is the way you came from Selkirk, which is seven miles distant. Yonder house, lower down on the opposite bank of the river, is Honeyburn, the abode of my kinsfolk the Pringles. They are my kinsfolk in nothing but name, and you

need not expect to see or become acquainted with them," she said in a hard, quiet, cold voice. "That hill directly facing us is on the Duke's estate of Bowhill, and the house sheltering beneath its western side is Hartrigge, which has been the dwelling-place of the Scotts for generations. The river, and the road with it, winds up to the manse and kirk of Yarrow, and on again until the river finds its source in St. Mary's Loch. That," she said, pointing to the grey old house which had interested me before, "is Wolflee, as I told you, the family seat of the Olivers. They were wont to be a goodly stock before love of gain poisoned the best impulses of their hearts. In times gone by the Baxters and the Olivers were as one family, but that has not been these many years."

"What brought about the difference, Miss Baxter?" I felt compelled to ask. She looked with darkening brow.

"I suppose it is the way of youth to be ever questioning," she said grimly. "Well, Magdalen Hepburn, old Walter Oliver of Wolflee did me a grievous wrong. He stole part of the lands of Broadlands from me—that park which separates the two dwellings, and which pertained to the Baxters from time immemorial."

"Stole it, Miss Baxter!" I exclaimed, in a vague way, my thoughts reverting to the old Border raids and feuds of which I had read so much.

"It was stolen, though the law said it was his. But it is a thing admitted on all hands that the honour and truth of the law of Scotland has become a thing of the past. Might is right now, and so, because my Laird of Wolflee was the intimate friend of all the judges and lawyers in the Court of Session, and because he was abler to bribe than I, a poor weak woman, the Knowe Park was severed from Broadlands and unrighteously added to the lands of Wolflee,"—with a bitterness which told that these morbid fancies had become convictions. "That wicked and grasping old man went to his account last year, and his son abides in Wolflee. They say he is a goodly young man, but he is too near-of-kin to the former laird to be all they say. Because of his father's sin his inheritance will never be blessed to him. I hope and pray that I may live to see the downfall of proud Wolflee and the scattering of the Olivers to the four winds of heaven." She drew her tall figure to its full height, her eyes flashed, her wasted fingers pointing to the battlements of Wolflee seemed to invoke a curse upon it and its solitary inmate. I was sore afraid, for amid the blessedness and peace of my father's home I had never dreamed of feelings so revengeful and passionate, of a hate so bitter as this. I laid my hand on Miss Baxter's arm. I lifted my fearless eyes imploringly to her face.

"Oh, Miss Baxter, hush! We all need to be forgiven. God does not bid us hate our fellow-creatures,

we are to do good to those who despitefully use us," I said tremblingly. The outstretched cold arm fell, and slowly Miss Baxter turned herself about from me and went away over to the fireplace. Though the room was warm to closeness she was shivering—the outburst of passion would tell sorely on her enfeebled frame.

"I forgot myself," she muttered; "think no more of it. Magdalen Hepburn, you look at me with rebuking eyes, but what do you know of it? Bairn, may the God you speak of, and in whom I used to believe, preserve you from such tribulations as mine! Now, get your bonnet and take a walk out of doors. I have not brought you here to coop you up in the house. I shall have recovered myself when you return."

I had no more to say. I went away slowly out of the room, got my hat and plaid, and went forth into the cool sweet freshness of the day. I have ever loved the morning, because, to my thinking, a body's heart is pure and clean and fresh before the dust and cobwebs of the day gather about it. I walked slowly along the avenue a little, pondering chiefly upon the miserable woman I had left. Surely no ordinary sorrows had thus changed to gall the milk of human kindness in her heart. One sentence repeated itself over and over in my mind, and would not be put away: "The God you speak of, and in whom I used to believe." I shuddered as the words rang their changes in my ears. If Miss Baxter had let go the anchor of the soul she

was desolate indeed. My heart overflowed with pity. I could have knelt down where I was and prayed that the spirit of God's peace would come again and dwell with her, that she might in the last days turn her thoughts from the sorrows of earth and find hope and comfort in the contemplation of that which was to come

My somewhat sombre meditations were interrupted by a short deep bark, and the next instant a magnificent mastiff bounded out of the thicket, and stood in rather a menacing fashion before me. It was not my usual to be afraid of dogs, but he was such a lion of a fellow, and his heavy jaws were so threateningly exposed, that involuntarily I shrank back. Just then a shrill whistle, followed by the call "Reiver! Reiver!" caused my rather formidable-looking companion to bound through the thicket from whence he had come. Then I saw, standing just beyond a low hedge to my right, the figure of a gentleman attired in a rough grey tweed suit, with a deer-stalker cap pushed so far back on his head that I saw the full breadth of a noble brow, beneath which gleamed a pair of honest eyes, which were smiling then in a reassuring manner upon me. He lifted his cap and spoke, and his tones were as pleasant as his eyes.

"I am sorry if Reiver alarmed you. I assure you his appearance *is* most deceitful. He is as quiet as a *lamb*."

"I was scarcely alarmed, sir," I answered. And then, somewhat to my discomfiture, I perceived that I had wandered from the beaten way, and that I now stood in the veritable Knowe Park which had proved the bone of contention betwixt the houses of Broadlands and Wolflee.

"I beg pardon, sir," I hastened to say. "I was thinking of other things, and so have become an unwitting trespasser upon your lands."

The latter part of my sentence slipped out unawares, and yet it was correct, for I had no doubt in my mind but that I was speaking to the Laird of Wolflee.

"No apology is necessary, madam," he said very courteously, and I wondered why his eyes never for a moment left my face. "May I inquire to whom I am speaking, in order that *I* may apologise for my dog's rudeness?"

"My name is Magdalen Hepburn. I am staying at Broadlands," I said simply and frankly, for, accustomed as I was to the free untrammelled ways of country life, I saw nothing out of the common in his question.

He looked surprised.

"My name is Oliver, Douglas Oliver of Wolflee," he said. "Good morning. Come, Reiver."

Again he lifted his cap and strode away across the Knowe Park, his dog following closely at his heels. And I? The face of Douglas Oliver occupied my thoughts as I slowly retraced my steps to Broadlands. *How strange* that we should meet on this the very

first morning of my sojourn on the banks of Yarrow! Strange indeed, but not so strange as what was yet to come. When I had taken off my things I went down to the drawing-room, and found Miss Baxter there, lying on a couch, reading the morning paper. She laid it aside when I entered, and looked keenly, I had almost written affectionately, into my face.

"You have got some red in your cheeks, Magdalen," she said kindly. "Have you had a pleasant walk?"

"Very. Guess whom I encountered in my stroll, Miss Baxter?" I asked, for I could not conceal my meeting with Douglas Oliver from her.

She shook her head.

"The Laird of Wolflee," I answered fearlessly. "I was walking so absorbed in thought that I wandered through your shrubberies into the Knowe Park without knowing where I was going. Then a big dog questioned my right to trespass, and then I saw the Laird himself."

"That was most indiscreet of you, Magdalen," she said harshly. "Did—did the young man speak?"

"He only apologised for his dog, and told me his name. I thought him a very manly fellow, Miss Baxter," I said boldly.

"Ay, ay, the young are easily deceived, and the Olivers ever had smooth false tongues and winning ways. Beware of Douglas Oliver, Magdalen Hepburn, he comes of a bad stock."

I kept unspoken my inmost thought, which was that the soul which had looked out from Douglas Oliver's grey eyes was incapable of deceit. I have ever proved the eyes to be the mirrors of the soul, and they cannot lie.

"Shall I read to you, Miss Baxter?" I asked, drawing my chair closer to the couch.

"No; talk to me. Tell me of your home, of your father's parish and work," she said, and slipping her arm under her head she lay back wearily and fixed her tired eyes on my face. A great rush of pity swept across my heart. I knelt down by her, I put my strong arms under the feeble shoulders, and bade her rest awhile upon them, for I was strong and willing, and glad to do even so little a thing for her.

"My dear, you are very good. I like you," she said, and a gentler softer expression stole across her face. "You are frank and fearless and true. *You* will not serve me as others have served me; I can trust you. I wish I had known you sooner."

"We will make the best of it now I am here," I said cheerily. "Now tell me how you occupy your days. Are there no duties I could perform for you? I am accustomed to work, and am miserable when I am idle."

"I have no occupation," she said drearily. "I rise in the morning wondering how the day is to be put in. I count the hours till night, and when night comes,

lying on my sleepless couch, I count the hours till morning."

"How awful!" I exclaimed, for I could not help it. To me it seemed truly awful to spend such a life when all around there was so much to do and so few to do it.

"Have you no social duties nor enjoyments? no church work—nothing?" I asked blankly.

"I hold no intercourse with my neighbours, as I told you," she said quietly. "I give liberally to the church, which I never attend. I head charitable lists with considerable sums, and I never turn the needy from my door."

"But, Miss Baxter, why live such an isolated and dreary life? I am sure you could be the centre of a happy social circle, beloved and honoured by all," I said impulsively; "and with your means what personal good you could do! There are a thousand things which might interest you and make your life happier than it is."

"I was disappointed in my youth, Magdalen Hepburn," she said, shaking her head. "What good or kindly impulses I may have had once have been poisoned by the treachery of friends, the unkindness of neighbours, and the coldness of the world. I will die as I have lived, unmolested and uncared for by any."

Before I could reply a visitor was announced. It was a relief to me to think that even one stranger set

foot within the walls of Broadlands. The intruder was the Reverend Mr. Dryburgh, minister of the parish. My heart warmed to the kindly old man, and I felt more at home in Broadlands while he was there than I had done yet. Miss Baxter talked to him courteously but coldly, I thought; but always when his eyes rested on her face I saw them glow with a tender and deep compassion.

"I hope your young friend will brighten for you the winter solitude of Broadlands," he said when he rose to go. "I trust you will permit her to visit us at the manse. My wife and my girls will make her truly welcome."

"Magdalen has fullest liberty here, Mr. Dryburgh," said Miss Baxter; then she turned and requested me to show the minister downstairs.

"My dear, this will be a strange quiet life for you," he said, as I helped him on with his overcoat in the hall. "But if you can brighten the present or the future for the poor lady upstairs yours will be a blessed ministry."

"I will try, Mr. Dryburgh," I said, and somehow my eyes suddenly overflowed. At that moment my dear home seemed very far away, and I felt indeed a stranger in a strange land.

"She has had many sorrows in her life, doubtless, but she has made many for herself, my child. I remember her well in youth, a proud, haughty, self-

willed maiden, who would brook no contradiction. She has been tried in the furnace, but the proud spirit is unbroken still, I fear. May it be yours to infuse a little of human love and kindness into her heart; and through that lead her into the presence of Divine love itself."

Then he went away, but the memory of his words remained.

CHAPTER IV.

IN YARROW KIRK.

UPON the Sabbath day I was driven in dreary state to the parish kirk of Yarrow. As the carriage was closed owing to the cold and dampness of the weather, I could not delight my eyes with the pastoral beauty of the surrounding scene, only I could discern through the mist-obscured window that we never for a moment lost sight of the pensive Yarrow, which flowed swiftly upon its course, without a murmur or a ripple to mingle with the sighing of the winter wind. How different the silent flowing of the gentle stream from the rush and roar of our tumbling mountain torrents at home! I felt, without knowing wherefore, a subdued yet pleasant melancholy steal over my heart—it was but my deep and silent sympathy with Yarrow. The sweet irregular tinkling of a bell warned me at length that we were coming near to the place of worship. Also I saw some stragglers on the road decent country folks in their best attire, reverently wending their way to the house of God. Very shortly

terwards the carriage stopped, and the coachman mped down and opened the door for me. When alighted and looked about me I felt suddenly and rangely moved. What a vast and boundless solitude as this! what peace and beauty seemed to rest upon ie vale! what majesty crowned the solemn hills, which emed almost like the limit of the world! What a lace wherein to worship God, I said inwardly, and rned to look at the quaint old church which stood in ie middle of its little burying-ground, reminding me ery much of our own kirk at home. I entered the ate and was about to occupy myself for a little in eading some of the inscriptions on the tombstones hen I saw the figure of a young girl emerge from the oor of the manse, which was close by. She came owards me and spoke with a truly pleasant smile on er winsome face.

"You are Miss Hepburn? I am Katie Dryburgh. Mamma bid me come and ask you to come in to the manse for a little while. It is quite ten minutes yet till service begins."

I smiled and thanked her, and we walked together to the manse. Who could resist the sweet and winsome ways of that pleasant bairn?

She took me into the dining-room, a wide and pleasant family room, where I found the minister's wife, his elder daughter Janet, and the youngest boy, a lad of fourteen. I felt at home with them at once,

and my heart went out in no ordinary way to Janet Dryburgh, for she was as true and kindly a woman as I had seen for many a day. How different the pleasant homelike freedom of the manse from the dreary loveless splendour of Broadlands! I felt glad that this opportunity was given me to make the acquaintance of the minister's folk.

"I think we had better go now, mamma," said Katie. "There 's the Laird of Wolflee riding by, and he 's aye last, and it is a long time since papa went to the vestry."

"Yes, we shall go," said gentle Mrs. Dryburgh. "If you do not care to sit alone in the Broadlands pew, Miss Hepburn, you are very welcome to a seat beside us. There is an empty space since Jamie went to college."

I thanked her, and said I would very willingly sit with them. So we went away in together, and took our seats in the minister's pew on his right hand, and then was I not at home indeed? The kirk was tolerably well filled, considering the scattered nature of the parish and the long distances many had to come. I very heartily enjoyed the service, only I was rather taken aback at the loud and clear sound my own voice had in the praise — evidently there were no great singers in Yarrow. Looking up once while I sang I met the earnest gaze of the Laird of Wolflee, who sat in the front pew in the gallery, and, not of my free will, a distinct tremor shook my voice. I could not undo

stand this inward shaking which came upon me at sight of the man, in the kirk too,—I, who had been set down as the old maid of the family long ago. However, all these thoughts vanished while listening to the sermon, which was indeed calculated to waken the godless and to strengthen and uphold God's people in the paths of peace. I felt the better for the service altogether, and I said so to Mrs. Dryburgh, who looked well pleased thereat. While the kirk was emptying, Katie Dryburgh pointed out to me the pew where the Ettrick Shepherd had been wont to sit on the rare occasions when he attended the house of God. It was of great interest to me to look thereon, and also to read some of the old and quaint writings on the tombs. Mrs. Dryburgh again desired me to come to the manse while Adam Scott got the horses into the carriage, but I preferred to linger outside. When we reached the gate we found the Laird of Wolflee waiting there. After his greetings to Mrs. Dryburgh she introduced him to me, and so we were placed upon the footing of acquaintances.

Before I went away Mrs. Dryburgh made me promise to come to my tea at the manse on the Wednesday afternoon, which I very willingly promised, upon condition that it was agreeable to Miss Baxter.

"Will there be a cup for me too, Mrs. Dryburgh?" asked the Laird of Wolflee, his eyes smiling rather entreatingly upon her.

"What a question, Douglas Oliver, when you know

there is a cup in mamma's press sacred to you," la
Katie, and there was no more said. He shook
with us all, sprang to his saddle, and gallope
How noble he looked upon his beautiful ho
thought, as we watched him ride away.

"He is a dear lad that, Miss Hepburn," saic
Dryburgh with a tear in her eye. "His mothe
my dearest friend, and a son of Mary Oliver's
needs be all that is truest and best in a ma
cause she was an angel on earth. Well, good-b
dear; we will look for you on Wednesday withou

Miss Baxter seemed pleased to see me come
again.

"I missed you when you were away, Magdale
said. "I fear you will become so necessary to m
I shall be for keeping you altogether."

I smiled in a well-pleased way, for if I could w
heart, might I not be able to soften it towards all
against whom she was so embittered now? T
thinking it was an unspeakably sad thing to s
so near the brink of the grave nursing such feelir
it was not the spirit of revenge and bitterness
would sustain her in the hour of death. I nev
down in my bed any night without praying
earnestly that her heart might be changed, an
she might ere long come to see that the law of l
best. We spent the evening in quietness togethe
I read for a little aloud from one of my own fa

books, which I had brought with me from home. I do not remember the name of it now, only I know it spoke much of the love of God in relation to ourselves and our human relationships, and showed how the spirit of Christ can make even the hardest, poorest, unloveliest life a thing of wondrous beauty and power and peace. Miss Baxter made no remark upon my reading, nor did I, but I was very agreeably surprised next day to come upon her poring earnestly over its pages. She seemed rather ashamed at being caught.

"I was looking over one or two sentences which you read last night, and which I did not quite understand," she said, as if in apology. "It is a clever and rather interesting book, but theory and practice are two very different things."

"I have seen the theories you find in its pages put into practice, Miss Baxter," I said, "and it is all true, every word."

That was all we said about it then. Miss Baxter was quite pleased for me to go to the manse on Wednesday, and she was very particular that I should look well. She was greatly taken up with my brocade gown, and expressed the utmost astonishment when I told her how I had come by it, and that I had made it myself. She also showed me a great quantity of jewellery, and desired me to choose what I would put on, but I just shook my head and said I would rather wear my gold and pebble brooch, made in the shape of

a thistle, which I had got from father and mother on my twentieth birthday.

"Well, perhaps you are right. You look very well, and I am proud of you, Magdalen Hepburn," she said, whereat I laughed very heartily, not feeling a bit vain, for I had been accustomed to think myself a very plain person, and so I was, in comparison with Lindsay my sister, who, as I told you, was very beautiful to look upon.

I was to walk to the manse, by my own desire, and the carriage was to come for me at eight o'clock in the evening. I wish I could write down all the enjoyment I had of my walk by the banks of Yarrow that clear and pleasant afternoon. I felt as if I was upon enchanted ground, and my heart was so light and so overflowing with gratitude to God for His goodness in permitting me to look upon this beautiful portion of His earth that I could have sung aloud for joy. When I neared the manse the sun was just setting, and the mystery of light and shade blending upon hill and dale, and mirrored in the stream, was just more than I could bear, and so I arrived at the manse with my eyes wet, and my whole soul stirred within me.

Need I write down that I was warmly welcomed to the manse? Janet Dryburgh took me to her bedroom to take off my things, and we stayed a little talking there, feeling drawn together as if we had known each other for years. Of all the women I have met, there is

none I love and honour more than Janet Dryburgh, and she remains to this day my dearest and most steadfast friend. When we went down to the drawing-room we found the minister and Mrs. Dryburgh there, talking to two ladies, at whom I looked with interest, being much prepossessed by their appearance. They were both elderly, and both looked as if they had had much tribulation in their lives, and yet their faded faces were most sunshiny and pleasant to look upon, telling of that inward peace which passeth all understanding, but which can still every tumult in the heart of poor humanity. They looked most thorough gentlewomen, and though their attire was in the fashion of a bygone day, it seemed so much in keeping with their appearance that nothing could have been more agreeable to look upon. What was my utter and almost speechless astonishment when Mrs. Dryburgh, taking me by the hand, introduced them to me as Miss Pringle and Miss Elizabeth Pringle of Honeyburn? It required all my energy to enable me to return their greetings courteously, and then I sat down rather helplessly in a chair. It seemed ordained that I should meet and learn to love all Miss Baxter's enemies—but there, what am I saying? Surely there could not be any thought of love in my heart for the Laird of Wolflee. Listening to the talk of the ladies, which seemed to overflow with love and kindness towards every human being, I was more and more astonished. Oh, how sad for Miss

Baxter herself, that she should thus isolate herself from those who might so materially have brightened her lonely life. My thoughts made me somewhat distracted in my manner I believe, and it was not till I heard Mrs. Dryburgh asking me to sing that I recovered myself. I rose and went to the pianoforte at once, for we had been taught at home that it was our duty to use whatever talent God had given to us for the pleasure of those about us. I suppose it is the outcome of that early training that to this day I have no patience with those affected young women who, though they possess the ability, require so much coaxing and flattering before they will sing or play in company. I never sang anything but Scotch songs, and so I began "The Flowers o' the Forest," as it was the first that suggested itself to me. I do not know whether I sang it well or ill, only I know that when I ceased my own eyes were full of tears, so powerful is the effect of music upon my soul. No one said anything for a little, but I saw that mine were not the only wet eyes in the room. Great was my astonishment then to perceive the Laird of Wolflee standing with his back to the door. He must have slipped into the room while I was singing, seeing he was not there when I began. Mrs. Dryburgh rose and shook hands with him, and he apologised for not coming to tea, as he had been detained at home by his neighbour of Philiphaugh. He came last to my side, and in a low voice thanked

me for my song. I know not why I could not look up into his eyes—truly I had never felt thus in the presence of any man before. Presently he went away to speak to the minister, then Miss Elizabeth Pringle crossed the room and sat down on the sofa beside me. When I looked into her face I seemed to see the spirit of my Aunt Agnes, my Uncle Donald's wife, looking out upon me, and I could scarcely speak.

"My dear Miss Hepburn, we may be friends, I hope, for the sake of my sister Agnes. She had ever a great talking of Margaret's bairns, as she called you and your sister," said Miss Elizabeth gently, and she laid one of her mittened hands almost entreatingly on mine; "my heart warmed to you whenever I saw you and heard your name."

"Thank you, Miss Elizabeth," I said, and pressed the hand which touched mine. There was a little shame in my heart, for was it not my Uncle Donald, my father's own brother, who had by his ne'er-do-weel ways and long neglect broken his wife's gentle heart, and been the cause of her early death?

"And are you to like the Lowlands, think you?" she asked presently in a more cheerful voice, seeing that I was a bit overcome.

"I never saw any place so beautiful as all about Yarrow, Miss Elizabeth," I made answer, and she smiled well pleased.

"We are of *your* mind also," she answered; "but we

have lived by Yarrow all our days. Is Miss Baxter well?" she added after a moment's pause, and I saw the gentle eyes cloud as if there was a sorrow in her heart about Miss Baxter.

"No; far from it," I answered, but said no more. Fain would I have spoken some of the innermost thoughts of my heart to Miss Elizabeth, but something kept me back.

"There is a sore gulf betwixt Broadlands and Honeyburn now," said the old lady in a lower voice. "Often the hearts of my sister and me are 'wae' for Susan Baxter. If you could tell her that we still feel towards her as in the pleasant days of our youth, she might take a thought either to come and see us with you or to send you by yourself."

"I would like to see the home where Aunt Agnes spent her young days," I said impulsively. "I can remember how she used to talk about Honeyburn."

"Ay, we never forget our bairn's hame, where our fathers and mothers dwelt, Miss Hepburn," said Miss Elizabeth; and then we got no more private talk, for the Laird of Wolflee came up to the sofa, and standing by my side began asking me questions about my opinion of the south country. And shortly Miss Elizabeth went back beside Mrs. Dryburgh and her sister, and the Laird and I were left in the corner alone.

"Do you think Miss Baxter would let me in if I were to venture to Broadlands?" he asked suddenly.

"Truly I think not," I answered hastily, for the very idea called up a picture of Miss Baxter's wrath.

"Look here, Miss Hepburn, has she been making me out a reprobate in your eyes?" he continued with such earnestness that I could not but laugh at him.

"There is a gulf betwixt Broadlands and Wolflee as wide as betwixt Broadlands and Honeyburn, Mr. Oliver," I said, just to quiet him.

"And all about that wretched bit of land my father disputed with Miss Baxter about. I believe it *did* belong by right to Wolflee, but my father ought to have left the thing alone. It was just a crotchet he took, and he would have his way. I assure you I would very gladly restore it to my neighbour if it would make peace between us."

"Perhaps there will be peace some day," I answered, not thinking very much of what I was saying.

"I hope so; perhaps *you* will make it, Miss Hepburn," said the Laird, and I felt sore angered with myself that the red should rise so foolishly in my cheeks.

"How long are you going to stay at Broadlands?" he asked presently.

"I don't know; just so long as Miss Baxter desires me to abide with her," I made answer a trifle stiffly.

"Then it is possible I may be able to redeem my character in your eyes," said the young man in the same earnest way.

"I never set myself to judge your character, Mr. Oliver, therefore it can need no redeeming in my eyes," I said.

He smiled then, and his face lit by that sunny smile was as pleasant a one as eyes could wish to see.

Just at that moment I was not sorry when a maid appeared to say that the carriage waited for me. I felt rather put about sitting beside the Laird of Wolflee, not knowing what, in his impetuosity, he might say next. And yet, though I would not admit it to myself then, I knew that it was a new and strange feeling of happiness to me to be near to him, to listen to the tones of his manly voice, and to watch the play of every varying expression on his pleasant face. I said good-bye to all the ladies before I left the room, and returned Miss Elizabeth's kind pressure of the hand with answering warmth. I felt drawn to her in no ordinary way, but I told myself it was because she reminded me so much of Aunt Agnes, my Uncle Donald's wife, who had been so dear to us all at Ardstruan Manse. When I got out to the carriage I found the minister and Douglas Oliver waiting to see me safely away. And the Laird of Wolflee with his own firm kind hands adjusted my wraps for me, and was even more solicitous than Mr. Dryburgh himself lest I should take cold. Also his close warm hand-clasp was the last which held my fingers, and his was the last good-night. Shall I write down, I wonder,

what the impetuous young man said? Well, I will, since I am writing my love-story, I may as well tell the beginning of it.

"I will risk Miss Baxter's displeasure and venture to Broadlands; I cannot 'lippen' to chance to see you again," he said, and I liked the sound of the good old Scotch word from his lips. "And after all it was my father with whom she was at war. Perhaps I may be able to make my peace with her."

I said nothing, but I think he knew that I at least would be glad to see him at Broadlands. Then Adam Scott gave the greys the rein, and we trotted away home. Truly never had two miles seemed so short a distance as they did that night. Miss Baxter was in her own room, but sent word that I was to come to her before I took off my things.

"Well, and had you a pleasant evening, and had Mrs. Dryburgh any company to meet you?" she asked.

I trembled a little as I made answer, "The ladies from Honeyburn were there, Miss Baxter, and the Laird of Wolflee came later," I said.

Very dark grew Miss Baxter's brow. "That was very ill done of Mrs. Dryburgh, but I will know what to say again when you are asked to the manse," she said harshly. "Now leave me, for I am too weary to listen to your talk to-night."

I felt hurt and grieved, for it had been none of my seeking that I went to the manse, nor had I any hand

in the gathering of the company together. Nevertheless I crushed out the little bitterness which arose in my heart, and bade her a gentle and kind good-night.

When I got to my own chamber I did a very unusual thing for me. I flung off my cloak, and, standing straight in front of the mirror, I took a survey of myself. I saw a tall, straight, well-proportioned figure, a dark but clear-skinned face with very ordinary features. A pair of dark blue eyes and a broad brow, from which waving masses of dark, glossy brown hair were brushed loosely back and knotted carelessly behind. No, I was not handsome, nor even good-looking, I told myself, and actually sighed as I turned away. Then the comical side of my proceedings struck me, and I laughed and shook myself. Truly it was a new and rather significant state of affairs when plain Magdalen Hepburn was becoming concerned about her appearance. And that was not the last laugh I had over it either. Dear me, but the heart of a woman is a strange and wayward thing, especially when it begins to waken beneath the touch of love.

CHAPTER V.

MY CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

LINDSAY, my sister, wrote to me very regularly from home, and occasional letters from father and mother came to assure me I was not forgotten at the manse of Ardstruan. The December days sped away very quickly, and yet it seemed long long since I had left home. Christmas week was ushered in by a heavy fall of snow, and then indeed I saw new and boundless beauties in Yarrow. But there! a plain woman like me could never describe the mystic and wonderful effects of the snow upon the hills and dales of that lovely land, nor of the fairy beauty of the pine-crested hill which we saw so plainly from the front windows of the house.

Whether it was the snow or the nipping frost I know not, but as December wore to its close it seemed to me that Miss Baxter grew feebler and feebler, and when she came downstairs at all it was only to lie for an hour or so upon the sofa in the drawing-room. I was much with her, reading and talking to her,

but though it was often in my mind to plead that the ladies from Honeyburn might be asked to come and see her, I never dared mention either their names or that of the Laird of Wolflee, lest it should agitate her—a thing to be avoided in her weak state of health. We were sitting together in her dressing-room one afternoon, just a day or two before Christmas, when she suddenly interrupted my reading and bade me bring her small writing-desk from the little table in the window. I did so, and unlocked it for her, when she took from thence two five-pound notes and laid them in my palm.

"Thursday will be Christmas day," she said; "take these, and go down the town and see if you can get anything to buy for those at home; nay, nay, take them—they are little enough payment for what you do for me every day," she added with a smile, for I drew myself up in rather an offended way. The bit pride that was in me made me want to decline her money, but she would not let me. Then, thinking of what I could get for the dear ones at home, of the fur-lined cloak for mother, and a certain expensive book father had been wanting for a long time, and of the silver bracelets Lindsay my sister so coveted for her fair arms, I lifted them with thankfulness of heart, and bending my head kissed Miss Baxter's brow.

"Are you wearying to get away from this dreary place, Magdalen?" asked the old lady wistfully.

"No; so long as you need me I will gladly stay," I made answer out of the sincerity of my heart.

"You are a good bairn, you take after your father; you have taught me, old woman though I am, some things I did not know before," she said drowsily. "There now, while I take my afternoon nap, go and bid Adam Scott get out the carriage, and get you away down to Selkirk to spend your money. If you have not enough there is plenty more here."

I went away gleefully as a bairn to do her bidding. I never had so much money to spend before, and I was quite excited over it and over the luxury of buying things for those I loved. I got mother's cloak, for which I paid four pounds ten, and I smiled to myself as I put it about my own shoulders, it was so snug and warm and such a handsome and goodly article besides. Then I bought the bracelets for Lindsay my sister, and pictured the bairn's delight over the pretty baubles when she should be clasping them on her arms. Last of all I went to the bookseller's, and though I hardly expected it in a country town, I got the book for father, also a big print Bible for Marjory, and then my money was all gone. How rich I felt as I saw all my purchases lying on the carriage seat! I could just have sung out in the exuberance of my delight.

It was gathering dark when we drove away out of the town again, but just as we reached the corner of

the Yair road I heard the clatter of hoofs, and then Adam Scott pulled up his horses, and the next minute the carriage window was pulled down from without and the Laird of Wolflee, bending down from his saddle, looked in upon me.

"Excuse my want of ceremony," he said blithely, "but when I heard you were in the carriage I could not resist asking what had become of you this long time; you have not even been at the kirk on the Sabbath days. I feared you had gone away home."

It never occurred to me to think it strange for the man to question me thus, as if he had a right to do so; only I know my heart grew glad within me at the very sound of his voice.

"Miss Baxter has been, and is, very poorly, and I have never been out of doors much," I answered simply.

"But you are keeping well I hope, and not thinking of leaving Selkirk for a while."

"Yes, I am well, and I shall likely be here so long as Miss Baxter needs me," I said, and then there was a moment's silence.

"Miss Hepburn, will you permit me to come to Broadlands to see you, since there is no other way?" asked the Laird of Wolflee presently in his blunt impetuous fashion.

"Miss Baxter——" I said faintly.

"Is she as bitter against me as ever?" he asked a little impatiently.

"Truly she never says your name. She is too far spent to be bitter against any mortal now," I answered sadly.

"I will risk it," he said, "for I must see you again."

I said nothing, and was glad that the night shadows hid my changing face.

"I wish I could see your face, Miss Hepburn. Why do you say nothing? If *you* will not make me welcome to Broadlands, say so, and I will bide at home," said he; and oh, how quick was I to note how his voice had changed. But I would not tell him what he wished to hear.

"It is time I was away home, Mr. Oliver," said I. "It will be dark upon us directly, and what if Adam Scott drives his coach over the banks of Yarrow?"

He laughed then, and his voice had a ring in it like a melody of happiness, which made my foolish heart beat.

"Well, good-bye, I *will* come to Broadlands," he said, and held out his hand. I laid my own in it, and he raised it to his lips. I had no power to be angry, or even dignified, though I knew a discreet gentlewoman should not permit such a liberty in a man. But then did I not trust Douglas Oliver with my whole soul? and did I not know that out of our

brief acquaintance had grown the love which was to be the blessing of our lives?

Miss Baxter had had her nap and her afternoon cup of tea also when I returned, and was now sitting up for a little at the fireside in her dressing-room. I went to her there, carrying all my parcels in my arms, and opened them out before her in great glee. She looked at them all with great interest, specially admired the cloak, and then asked where my own Christmas was.

"Oh, I didn't need anything; and, you know, you said I was to buy presents for them at home," I said.

"Is there never a thought of self in your heart, Magdalen?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, many a one!" I said blithely. "Was it not to please myself I ran to spend my money, just as Lindsay and I used to run to the village to buy toffee with our pennies when we were bairns?"

"That was what it was given for," she said. "But come, tell me what *you* would like for your Christmas?"

I turned my head a little away. Did I not know well that the most blessed Christmas gift which could come to me would be to see peace restored between Broadlands and Wolflee and Honeyburn?

I swept aside all my purchases, and, kneeling down on the rug at Miss Baxter's feet, I clasped my hands on her knee and looked up into her worn face. I was all trembling as I did so, and I felt the red rising in my cheeks.

"I hid my face, and went on in a lower voice."—p. 65.

"Miss Baxter," I said, "I met the Laird of Wolflee just outside of Selkirk to-day."

"And what of that?" she said listlessly; and to my relief neither face nor voice hardened.

"He stopped and spoke to me, Miss Baxter, and——"

"And what?" Her voice was startled now.

I hid my face and went on in a lower voice, "He asked, did I think you would let him come to Broadlands? and he asked me would *I* let him come?" I paused, for I felt Miss Baxter's frame beginning to tremble also.

"Well?" she said, in a low, almost inaudible voice. Then I broke down, and my tears fell hard and fast on the wasted hands I held firm in mine.

"If you asked me again what I should like for my Christmas, Miss Baxter," I said, "I would say, Let there be peace between Wolflee and Honeyburn and Broadlands, and there will be no happier heart in Scotland than Magdalen Hepburn's." I feared to look up. I feared almost to move. I did not know how the words had ever passed my lips.

At last Miss Baxter spoke, and her voice was very low and troubled. "Rise up, Magdalen, and leave me for a little. See, take up the things you have bought and make them ready to be sent away, and then go down and have your dinner, and I will send for you when I want you again. I would be alone for a little. You ask a great deal, Magdalen Hepburn; it is not in

a moment that the barriers of a lifetime can be swept away."

I did as she bid me. I gathered all the things together and left her, with a yearning prayer in my heart. I ate but little dinner that night. I wandered back to the drawing-room, tried to play and sing and read, all by turns, but it was of no use, my heart and my thoughts were up in Miss Baxter's dressing-room, and I was in a perfect fever of anxiety and hope and boding fears. O God, grant the hard heart may be softened! was my inward and unceasing prayer. I had been three hours downstairs by myself, when Jessy, the house-maid, came to tell me Miss Baxter wished to see me. I, strong-minded, self-reliant Magdalen Hepburn, trembled so as I went upstairs that I had to support myself by holding on to the balustrade.

But who among us has not our weak as well as our strong moments, born of the deepest emotions of the soul? Miss Baxter was sitting where I had left her, only her head was leaning wearily back among the pillows, as if her strength was far spent. I went to the side of the chair, put my hand on her shoulder, then she looked up at me with a faint smile. I did not know how or why it was, but to me her face seemed changed.

"You have won, my bairn," she said. "Get my desk again and write down what I tell you."

I hastened to obey. I felt that pen could never keep

time with the eagerness of my heart. And this was what I wrote to Miss Baxter's dictation:—

"BROADLANDS, 23*rd December*, 1851.

"MY DEAR KINSWOMEN,—Since the coming of my beloved niece, Magdalen Hepburn, to abide at Broadlands, I have been led to see things in a new light. She has shown to me all the error and bitterness of my past life, and that without so much as speaking about it. I see now, and feel very deeply, that in acting as I have towards you, simply because your sister Agnes filled the place I expected to fill, I have been guilty of a grievous sin. For the sake of the old and pleasant days when as bairns we pu'd the gowans and thread the rowans in the dens of Yarrow, for the sake of the love which was between our forefathers when Honeyburn and Broadlands were as one, and, last of all, for the sake of my dear bairn, Magdalen Hepburn, your own sister's niece, will you let bygones be bygones and come to Broadlands, since I am no longer able to go to Honeyburn? It will be somewhat of a solace to me in the last days of my life, which must be few now, if I can have your companionship, for there are memories between us which will awake the renewal of our youth —a very pleasant theme for us all.—I am your repentant and affectionate kinswoman, SUSAN BAXTER."

I folded up the letter, addressed it to Miss Pringle, and then looked inquiringly at Miss Baxter.

"Adam Scott will take it over to Honeyburn in the morning; and as for the Laird of Wolflee," she added with a tender yet humorous smile, "we will let him come when he is bold enough; and if he is very long about it we will send Adam Scott for him likewise."

I could not speak for the tears running down my cheeks, but I put my arms about Miss Baxter's neck and kissed her. I think she understood.

"Now, get away downstairs, bairn, for I must go to bed," she said, with a gentleness which did me good. "Eh, Magdalen Hepburn, you have a deal to answer for. You have done what I thought no power on earth could do. Soldered again the parted houses of Broadlands and Honeyburn and Wolflee." It was long ere I slept that night, so eager was I for the morning light.

Immediately after breakfast, Adam Scott, greatly to his own astonishment, was despatched with the letter to Honeyburn. He was told not to wait an answer, and upon his return I set myself to watch for the coming of the ladies. The forenoon passed, however, without bringing them. My heart began to sink. What if they, conscious of their own blamelessness in the long estrangement, should be careless or indifferent about making up now? But remembering their kind faces, and also Miss Elizabeth's peaceable words, I tried to banish my fears. After lunch Miss Baxter began to get very uneasy, and, unable to witness the eagerness with which her eyes would turn ever and anon to the

window, I left her alone and stationed myself on the broad ledge of the library window, from whence I could see right down the avenue to the gate. About three o'clock, greatly to my delight, I beheld two figures enveloped in grey cloaks, which I recognised as pertaining to the Misses Pringle, enter the gate. Poor ladies! I did not know then that these old-fashioned garments, which were ridiculed by some of the rising generation, were only worn because money was lacking for the purchase of more modern attire. I did not run and tell Miss Baxter. I waited patiently till the two figures came up to the door, and then I went down myself to admit them. Each of them wrung my hand, and I could see in their faces traces of deep emotion.

"This is a happy and unlooked-for day for us, my dear," said Miss Elizabeth. "God bless you, you have done great good in Broadlands."

"Hush, Miss Elizabeth," I said deprecatingly. "Will you come upstairs at once? I think it better that you should. She has looked for you all day."

They nodded, and silently we three went upstairs, and I opened the door. Miss Baxter, sitting alone in the soft blending of firelight and daylight, sharply turned her head.

"The ladies are here, Miss Baxter," I said, and then I shut the door and went away. For I was not of them, and it was better that these three lonely women, whose hearts, in spite of long estrangement, were knit to-

gether by the bonds of a past which reached the ti
when they had clasped their childish hands in lo
should meet unhindered and unobserved by any strai
eyes, even though these eyes, like mine, should overfl
with sympathy and love.

CHAPTER VI.

PEACE.

THEY sent for me by-and-by, and I went upstairs, I looked rather anxiously at Miss Baxter, for I had greatly feared the agitation of this meeting for her. But to outward seeming she was calm and self-possessed, though there were traces of tears on her cheeks. The ladies sat a little apart, and they had been weeping too. Miss Baxter stretched out her hand and drew me to her side. "This is the witch who has wrought the charm. Who would ever have thought that a Hepburn bairn would make peace between Broadlands and Honeyburn?" she said with a tremulous smile. "As you know these ladies already, Magdalen, my dear, I need not introduce them to you. And now do you go and order a cup of tea to be brought up, and we will drink it together before they go, and they will come again to-morrow."

"It is ready, dear Miss Baxter; I thought you would all like it," said I, and Miss Baxter exchanged glances with the ladies.

"Did I not tell you what a willing helpful bairn is?" she said triumphantly, and I was glad to e from these praises of myself.

What a cosy pleasant tea-drinking that was! though I said little, it did me good to hear their of old times, folks and things. Though their work not my world, I could enter it with them and pathise with the memories in which I had no It was quite dusk when they went away, and I took them downstairs they bade God bless me said a great many kind and generous things v I must not write down. When I got back to Baxter I found her lying among her pillows wit expression of deep peace on her face.

"Come here, my blessed bairn," she said to me the very tones of her voice sounded different som in my happy ears. "Come and let us talk over al wonderful change together."

I sat down beside her, and she took my hand in

"They are kind Christian women, Joan and Eliz Pringle," she said. "It wonders me that they car ready to forgive me—ay, it wonders and humble indeed."

"It is better, is it not, dear Miss Baxter, to be a with them again?" said I.

"Ay, far far better. My poor cousins! They a poor, Magdalen Hepburn, that they have to wo sewing and fine lace for their daily bread. They

nothing in the world but the roof-tree of Honeyburn, Magdalen, and I with thousands lying useless in the bank."

"That can be remedied now," I said soothingly.

"Ay, ay, so it can, and will. To-morrow you will go or send Adam Scott to Selkirk for Mr. Farquharson, the lawyer, and I will make everything right. Sitting wearing themselves over sewing and lace-work for daily bread, at their time of life," she added mournfully, "and I with thousands in the bank."

Next day I thought Miss Baxter not so well, and pleaded with her to delay sending for the lawyer lest it should unduly excite or weary her. But she seemed restless, and anxious that no time should be put off, so early in the forenoon Adam went off on horseback to Selkirk. I bade him call in at the doctor's on his way and ask him to come up to Broadlands in the evening. Mr. Farquharson arrived about half-past two, and was alone with Miss Baxter in the drawing-room for more than two hours, after which he came down to take a bit of dinner with me before returning to the town. I thought he looked at me curiously several times in the course of our conversation, which did not flag, though we were strangers to each other, for he was a very affable man and a fluent talker. Miss Baxter did not feel much inclined to talk when I joined her upstairs, only she told me what a relief it was to her mind now that she had seen Mr. Farquhar-

son and made everything right. It was a wise and prudent step, for after that there was no day upon which poor Miss Baxter's mind was clear enough to fix itself upon the intricate formalities ever inseparable from any dealings with the law. And then began an anxious and mournful time for me, watching and nursing the old lady, never sure of how soon the end might come. The ladies from Honeyburn came to my assistance, and very grateful was I for their kindness. Their gentle ways, noiseless movements and soft footfalls were invaluable in a sick-room. But though I am sure they were better adapted for nursing than I, Miss Baxter liked my hands best about her bed. Though she was unable to speak much, I learned to read every expression of her face, and to know the meaning of the satisfied look when I did anything for her. The Dryburghs were most kind also, and the minister came every day to Broadlands. And I must not forget to write down that the Laird of Wolflee came very often to ask for his neighbour. I only saw him on one occasion, in the library, for a few minutes, and then our demeanour towards each other was strangely stiff and constrained, probably because the impulses of both our hearts were so tightly held in curb. And truly it was better so, for it was not fit nor seemly that there should be any love-making in the house of sickness. But though I did not see him again, I was kept in mind of him by constant gifts of fruit and flowers from

the rare hothouses of Wolflee, and very pleasant it was to me to know in my inmost heart that I was so much in his thoughts. So January wore away, and there was not like to be much betterment for poor Miss Baxter, although she did not appear to grow any worse. She was not able to talk much, as I said, but I remember one afternoon, early in the month of February, she seemed to acquire a sudden strength, for she spoke out to me in a loud clear voice, which rather startled me, and brought me over from my reading in the window to her bed.

"What kind of a day is this, Magdalen?" was the question she asked.

"Quiet and fine; there has been no breath of air stirring," I made answer. "Do you feel better to-day?"

"Yes, like my old self; only I am not deceived. Go away over to the window, Magdalen, and tell me all you see. Tell me how Yarrow and Bowhill and all the countryside looks to-day."

In no small astonishment I obeyed. Once or twice that day, looking out, I had been struck by the strange boding stillness in the air, the motionless aspect of nature, and the sky, though bright and clear, had a strange unsettled look upon it I did not like to see. I forgot to say that a sudden thaw had melted all the snow, except on the colder hill-tops and in deep clefts and by sheltered dykesides which the sun could not reach.

"The snow is all gone from the hills, Miss Baxter," I answered, "but there are white caps yet on Wheathope and Pilmuir. And the pastures are all bare again, but they have a 'blae' look, as if the snow had chilled them through and through. The only green thing is the firs on Bowhill, and it is so still a day that there is not a branch or a leaf stirring from base to summit. Yarrow is not like itself. It is a turbid muddy stream overflowing its banks in a very sullen fashion, not like our winsome Yarrow. It is like the wild and roaring Ettrick to-day."

"You describe it well; I see it all," said Miss Baxter in a satisfied tone. "Now, come and sit down here, I have many things to say."

When I had sat down by her bedside Miss Baxter turned her eyes eagerly on my face. They seemed to have grown larger somehow, and had a brightness very different from the look which had been in them for many days.

"This is the last illness, Magdalen," she said; "I know that I shall never rise again, and that in a few days, perhaps a few hours, I shall meet my Maker face to face."

I said nothing, for I could not contradict her. Dr. Turnbull had apprised me but yesterday that it was but a question of days now.

"Dear Miss Baxter, what of that if you are prepared?" said I very low and softly. "You have lived

many years and known many sorrows, your rest is coming soon."

"How do I know that?" she asked sharply. "The rest remaineth *only* for the people of God. I am not one of His people. I have lived a narrow, selfish, barren life. I have never served Him. I have lived a good moral life, perhaps, but have I not broken, not once, but always, the two commandments, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' and the second like unto it, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'? Has the spirit of malice and revenge and bitterness I have nursed for half a lifetime prepared me for this change?"

I laid my soothing hands on hers. I prayed for help, trembling at the responsibility which lay upon me.

"Miss Baxter," said I, "in the mercy and love of God there is pardon for sins more heinous than those. Christ Jesus died to save sinners, *not* the righteous."

"I know, I know; but think of my wasted life, of my neglected opportunities," she groaned; "of the good I might have done, but which I wilfully passed by. Hoarding riches when my fellow-creatures starved, shutting my heart against every good impulse, neglecting to worship God either on my own hearthstone or in the courts of His house. What punishment can be too great for such sins as these, Magdalen Hepburn?"

"Though they be as scarlet, they shall be as wool,"

I pleaded. "A broken and a contrite heart is very precious in God's sight, and He will not cast out even at the eleventh hour. Keep hold of the cross of Christ. It is always there for us to cling to, and God is a Father of mercy and love."

"It is a poor pitiful thing, Magdalen, to clutch hold of the cross now, just like a drowning man trying to save himself," she said slowly. "A poor, pitiful kind of thing to come to God at the end of a long life which has *not* been spent in His service, asking forgiveness and begging to be let into heaven."

The speech was characteristic of the woman. Her rugged and independent nature shrank from what appeared to her only a form of selfishness.

How could I convince her that the God of infinite love and mercy, *even* at the eleventh hour, gladly welcomes his children back to the fold?

"Dear Miss Baxter, think nothing of the past. Leave it all behind, it is blotted out of God's book of remembrance, if only you will look to Jesus now," I cried in my great and solemn earnestness. "Think of nothing but His love. Rest upon it—it is for you, waiting for you. It will sustain and comfort you in the darkest hour, and when that dark hour is past there is rest."

"Rest, rest," she repeated dreamily. "How sweet after pain! 'Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden,' the Word says. Well, I am weary,

yes, and heavy laden with the burden of the past. And if it is for all, it must be for me, yes, for me."

She closed her eyes, and so restful did her face become, that I, fearing to disturb her, neither spoke nor moved. But up from my yearning heart rose a voiceless petition for the trembling soul voyaging fast towards the mystery of that which was to come. When I saw at length that she had fallen into a gentle slumber, I bent my head on my hands in thanksgiving, for it seemed like an answer to my prayer. It was so like the sleep of a little child lulled to rest by the assurance of a father's love and care.

I rose very softly at length, and walked to the window again. Then I saw that the face of nature had undergone a strange and sudden change. The cloud, "no bigger than a man's hand," I had noted above Wheathope before had spread half across the sky. There was a great stirring among the pines on Bowhill, and in the air a deep moaning sough, the warning note of the coming storm. A fierce yellow glare on the western horizon showed sharply against the black rugged edges of the cloud, and mingling with the dark shadow rapidly enveloping the earth, added to the weirdness of the scene.

A few hours later the tempest broke. May God in His mercy grant that I may not be a witness to such another. It was as if all the powers of earth and air were let loose, and were fighting for the mastery. We

womenfolk, sitting alone in the house of Broadlands, looked at each other with scared white faces while the tempest raged and roared without, shaking the old house to its very foundations. And through it all Miss Baxter slept on calmly and peacefully as a child. Towards midnight the violence of the storm somewhat abated, only to be renewed again with added force in the early morning. There was no thought of bed for any of us that night. Jessy, the housemaid, sat with me in the sick-room. Miss Baxter's maid, Christina Jeffrey, being too nervous to abide with us, joined the cook and the kitchen-maid downstairs. And so that awful night wore away. About five o'clock came the calm, and I, looking out, thankfully saw the stars of hope and promise gleam again in the firmament of heaven. Then I sent poor Jessy away to lie down for a little, and prepared the couch for my own brief repose. Still Miss Baxter slept. Although not much versed in sickness, for the manse of Ardstruan was ever a healthy house, I began to feel a trifle uneasy at that protracted slumber. And yet I feared to awake the sleeper, not knowing but that such blessed repose might be the saving of her life. Resolving that, with the first streak of dawn, I should send the maid to rouse Adam Scott to go for the doctor, I lay down, but I could not sleep. I rose again at half-past six, and as it was a clear morning the light was already breaking. I drew up the blind and looked out. The storm had

spent itself, but it had left its footprints behind. Right across the lawn lay a tall and stately oak torn up by its deepest roots. The avenue was rendered impassable by broken boughs and fallen trees, and beyond the gates there rolled a fierce wild sea swollen until it was level with the road—a mighty contrast surely to the silver thread of Yarrow.

My eyes travelled across to Bowhill. The shadows lay dark upon it yet, but I could discern what appeared to be a great confusion,—surely the beauty and the symmetry of the giant slope seemed destroyed. The broad light of day was to reveal the full destruction wrought there and elsewhere during the watches of the night. With a sigh I turned away, lifted my candle, and went over to look at Miss Baxter. Sleeping still, thought I, and a sudden dread seized upon my heart. There was a motionless stillness in that sleep which should not be. Where was the quiet respiration, the gentle heaving of the breast, we are wont to see in ordinary slumber? My shaking hand went forth and fell tremblingly upon the heart. Still, still, for evermore! Truly, "In an hour when ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

CHAPTER VII.

MY INHERITANCE.

WHEN all was over I went to my bed and slept —that heavy and dreamless sleep which so often supersedes a long vigil which death has ended. When I awoke there was a yellow glow streaming through my chamber window; and when I arose to learn its cause I found to my amazement that it came from the setting sun, and that my watch hands pointed to five o'clock. I hastily dressed myself and went downstairs. Then I learned that there had been many callers at Broadlands, among others the Laird of Wolflee and the ladies from Honeyburn. Faithful Jessy, however, had denied me to one and all, knowing I required an unbroken rest.

After I had had a cup of tea I sat down and wrote a note, which I sent Adam to deliver at Honeyburn. It contained the request that one or both of the ladies would return with the carriage and abide with me until the arrival of my father, for whom I had telegraphed before I slept. In little more than an hour Miss

Elizabeth was with me; and very comforting did I find her kindly presence in the house of death. Together we went upstairs to look at all that remained of the mistress of Broadlands. Her face was most sweet and pleasant to look upon, and the beauty of its early youth had come again. Surely, thought I, unless there had been peace within, that expression of tranquillity and peace could not have rested on the face in death.

"What hope had she, think you, as she drew near the gates of death?" asked Miss Elizabeth gently.

Then I told her something of what had passed between us before she fell into that sleep which was to know no awakening on earth.

"You have been greatly blessed and privileged, Magdalen Hepburn," said the good old lady with streaming eyes. "I doubt not but that the restless soul of poor Susan Baxter has found peace at last."

Then we went downstairs again, and, sitting by the hearth, we talked low and softly of the dead. Miss Elizabeth seemed to find no small comfort and pleasure in recalling the days of their childhood, when the three little girls at Honeyburn and the idolised child of Broadlands were sisters in heart and purpose, before the bitterness of a later day estranged them from each other. As for me, my heart was very sore, for I felt as if I had lost a friend. I had learned to love Miss Baxter in spite of her uncertain temper and somewhat unlovable ways, and her death was a real grief to me.

About half-past seven there was a knocking at the hall door, and then the noise of some one entering the house. Presently Jessy came to the dining-room door, saying the Laird of Wolflee was in the library and would speak with me a moment if I would so favour him. I rose at once and hurried away, but not before Miss Elizabeth had been witness to my tell-tale face.

The light in the library was somewhat subdued, greatly to my relief; but when I gave my hand silently to Douglas Oliver, he drew me over to the lamp and looked with searching eyes into my face. I tried to free myself and to avert my conscious face from his earnest gaze, but he only held me the firmer.

"It seems years since I saw you," he said quickly. "Do you grudge me a few minutes, Magdalen? Does it displease you that I should care to look upon the face dearer to me than any other in the world?"

I know not what I said. All I remember now is that I no longer struggled in his clasp, but that my head found a resting-place on his manly breast.

"Magdalen, my darling, my wife to be, I hope," he said passionately, "only tell me that you can care a little for me, rough-and-ready fellow though I be, and I will go away and not trouble you any more to-night."

I told him what he wished to hear and more. I said that my whole heart was his—for where perfect faith and love exist there need be no reserve. It was a strange commingling in my heart that night—grief that

I had lost my friend, joy that I had found what is, and must ever be, the crown of a woman's heart and life. I sent him away at last and went back to Miss Elizabeth, and knowing that she wondered at my long absence, I told her my secret.

"God bless you and him, my dear," she said fervently. "He is a noble manly fellow. He has the heart of his mother, Mary Oliver, who was one of the few utterly unselfish women I have ever met."

Next morning Mr. Farquharson came up from Selkirk, and he it was who made all the arrangements for the funeral. Late in the evening of the same day my father arrived at Broadlands, and great was my joy and comfort at sight of him. He seemed surprised at beholding Miss Elizabeth in the house, for in the throng of my many duties I had not had time to write fully about everything.

"Your daughter made peace between Broadlands and Honeyburn before the end," she said to him with tears in her eyes. "Is it not strange, Robert Hepburn, that you and I should meet, old man and old woman in Susan Baxter's house of Broadlands?"

"Ay, strange indeed!" said father dreamily, and I saw that his thoughts were of the past. Then they sat down together and began their old-time crack, and for the time I was forgotten.

It was seven-and-twenty years since father had been in Selkirkshire before, and then it was when he had

performed the ill-fated marriage ceremony which bound his ne'er-do-weel brother Donald to gentle Agnes Pringle of Honeyburn. My mother had been unable to accompany him then, because I was a baby in arms.

Upon the following afternoon Miss Baxter was carried to her rest in the kirkyard of Yarrow. There was a great gathering at the burying, for the name of Baxter of Broadlands was one of the oldest in the countryside, and the deceased lady was the last of her race. It is a sad and solemn thing for the womenfolk left behind to watch the slow wending of the funeral train away from the house, and an experience calculated to make them examine whether they be ready and prepared for the last summons. For no man nor woman knows how or when that summons may come. There returned to the house for the reading of the will Dr. Turnbull, Mr. Dryburgh the minister, and Captain Scott of Hartrigge; in company with my father and Mr. Farquharson the lawyer from Selkirk. There had been a talk between the Miss Pringles about specially asking Douglas Oliver of Wolflee to return also; and very thankful was I afterwards that the invitation had not been given. Mr. Farquharson, being a very dignified and proper person, had all his preliminaries to go through before he proceeded to read aloud the substance of the will itself. So briefly and concisely was it stated that I think I can recall it word for word.

"I, Susan Baxter of Broadlands, being in my sound

mind and judgment, do hereby, on this twenty-fourth day of December, eighteen hundred and fifty-one, dispose of my moneys and properties as follows:—

"First, to my faithful serving-woman, Christina Jeffrey, the sum of fifty pounds per annum, as long as she lives, together with that two-storey house, number nineteen in the Nethergate of Selkirk, to be her absolute property to do with whatsoever she will. Also to my coachman, Adam Scott, fifty pounds per annum, so long as he lives. Also to my maids at present with me in my house of Broadlands (here followed their names) the sum of fifty pounds, to be paid within a month of my decease. Then to my kinswomen, Joan Pringle and Elizabeth Grace Pringle of Honeyburn, the sum of three thousand pounds each, to be paid within a month of my decease. And with my bequest I would entreat them to forgive me for my long coldness towards them, which I do most truly and heartily repent this day. To my friend and kinsman, Robert Hepburn, minister of Ardstruan, the sum of one thousand pounds, and the further sum of one hundred pounds to be spent in the replenishing of his library. To his wife, whom I have never seen, I bequeath the sum of five hundred pounds, together with my amethyst and gold set of brooch and earrings, which will be found in my jewel-case. Also to her second daughter, Lindsay Hepburn, the sum of five hundred pounds, together with my pearl and ruby pendant and necklace, also to be found

in my jewel-case. Last of all, to my dear and well-beloved young kinswoman, Magdalen Forbes Hepburn, I leave and bequeath my lands and home of Broadlands, together with all furnishings and plate to be found therein, as also my entire wardrobe and jewellery. And in the event of the said Magdalen Forbes Hepburn becoming a wife and mother, I hereby will and declare that Broadlands shall become the property of her second child, when he or she comes of age. If said child should prove a son, I desire that he shall be called by the name of Donald Hepburn Baxter, but if a daughter I make no condition regarding her. And I leave with the said Magdalen Forbes Hepburn my solemn blessing and love. And I hereby declare that this is my last will and testament, for which every other document must be set aside 'and declared null and void.'"

When Mr. Farquharson ceased there was a dead silence. I sat staring straight before me, not comprehending what had befallen me. I was awakened, however, by Mr. Farquharson coming towards me with outstretched hand.

"Allow me to congratulate you very heartily, Miss Hepburn, upon your inheritance," he said in his pompous way. "It is no small satisfaction to me that my client should have left her possessions in such wise and prudent hands."

Then the ladies came and kissed me, and Captain Scott and Mr. Dryburgh congratulated me likewise,

only my father standing in the window with his back to me never moved. Unable to remain any longer, so overwhelming were the emotions which possessed me, I hastily quitted the room and ran away upstairs. Some impulse drew me towards the room which to-day was empty for the first time. I sat down there and tried to realise that I, Magdalen Hepburn, who had been so long content to rule the plain and economical household ways of Ardstruan Manse, was now a great lady, mistress of Broadlands, to whom the rightful dues of a great estate would henceforth be paid. I knelt down by the bed, I laid my face on the pillow which Miss Baxter's quiet head had so lately pressed, and prayed that I might be guided to walk humbly and wisely in this new strange path which was opened up for me. There was neither joy nor pride in my heart in that hour, only great fear and trembling, for oh! how few among us can stand prosperity, how few among us can wield the reins of wealth and high estate, and still keep unspotted from the world! My fervent petitions, my casting all my care upon God, soothed at length my troubled and fearful spirit. And my chief thought as I rose was not of the honour and dignity of my new estate, but of the opportunities thus given to me for doing good. I had never thought of riches merely for selfish gratification, but as a means for brightening life for those I loved, and beyond that for the alleviation of the burdens of others. Might I think so still! Might

I ever be found through all my life, whether that life be long or short, willing to spend and be spent in the service of the living God! With these inward yearnings in my spirit I went downstairs, to be taken to my father's heart.

"God bless you, my daughter, and enable you in your new position to serve Him as you have done since you first understood that service is the first joy and duty of a loving heart," said my father; then my heart was at rest.

That night Douglas Oliver came once more to Broadlands. I need not write down how my father, reading at a glance, that fearless, manly, upright soul, bravely stifled the natural regrets of a father's heart, and to a brief earnest question freely answered Yes. When Douglas Oliver rose to go, I put my shawl about me and went with him to the door, for I was his betrothed now, under the approving sunshine of a parent's smile.

"So it is the lady of Broadlands I am to wed now?" said my Douglas, and I fancied there was a shade of regret in his tone.

"Nay, as plain Magdalen Hepburn I was won," I whispered as I hid my face. "I will never be the lady of Broadlands to you. It is too heavy a charge for me. I give it to you, Douglas, and so the Knowe Park will be restored again when Broadlands and Wolflee are one."

"True, but I would rather have had my tocherless lass," said Douglas.

"Will you give me up because Miss Baxter made me her heiress?" I asked in rather an offended tone.

"Give you up! God forbid!" said Douglas, with an earnestness which completely satisfied my heart. After a little he added dreamily, "You will not keep me waiting long, my Magdalen? Wolflee has been a dreary house since my mother died. I wish you had known my mother; she was an angel on earth." I saw the tear start in his eye, and I honoured and loved him for it.

"I will try," I whispered, "with all my heart I will try, not to fill your mother's place, Douglas, only to make her loss less hard to bear."

"You have done that already, my darling. It was her last prayer that I would marry a wife who would help, not hinder me, in the true way. I think she guided me to you," said Douglas; and there was a far-away look on his face, which awed me and kept me very still. "I am a rough-and-ready fellow, my dearest, hasty of speech and impulsive of action, but I *want* to be and to do good, to live as *she* would have had me live. You will help me, will you not, my darling?"

"I will try, and God will help us both," I said, and my tears overflowed. For my heart was so filled with blessedness that it could hold no more. I thought so then, but I know now that there are higher heights of

bliss, a keener joy in which deep suffering commingles. But let me not dwell upon it here.

* * * * * *

It is two-and-forty years since I stood that night with my beloved upon the moonlit doorstep of Broadlands. Two-and-forty years! and I am in the house of Broadlands still, a lone woman, desolate in my autumn time. Desolate, did I say? Nay, for there is a little hand clasping mine as I write, and a childish voice begs "grandma" to leave writing, for Douglas is weary playing alone. I turn and lift him to my knee, and clasp him to my heart. Douglas Oliver—Douglas Hepburn Oliver—the little heir of Broadlands and Wolflee! Then I look beyond the Knowe Park to the house of Wolflee, where abides my one son Douglas Oliver, with his winsome girl-wife, Marjorie Fleming of Wheathope, a daughter of my old friend Janet Dryburgh of the manse. Ten years did I abide a happy wife in Wolflee, for nine summers and winters did my darling and I watch together the growth of our one son, and then the desolation of my widowhood fell upon me—my beloved was taken in his prime, to wait for me, with the angel-mother, on the other side.

Two-and-thirty years have I pursued my widowed way in this weary world. During these years I have bidden my kinsfolk farewell one by one — father, mother, Lindsay my sister (who was laid to rest with her first baby on her breast), and many others have

gone and left me behind. And I, leaving the house of Wolflee to my son and daughter, have come back to Broadlands to abide until the few shadows which lie between me and my beloved shall flee away. It will not be long. Already the little Douglas begins to wonder why grandma walks so slow, and why, even on sunny days in the pleasant garden, she grows wearied so soon and is glad to rest.

Grandma knows why it is. Others are able and willing to do the work for which she no longer has sufficient strength. Younger hearts and hands have set her aside a little in the walks of life, and so her hold upon the earth will not be difficult to loose. She is content, nay, glad and thankful that it is so, for to her heaven is *home*.

So may you feel, my little Douglas, when the years of your earthly pilgrimage are accomplished and heaven draweth nigh!

THE END.

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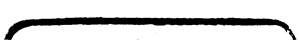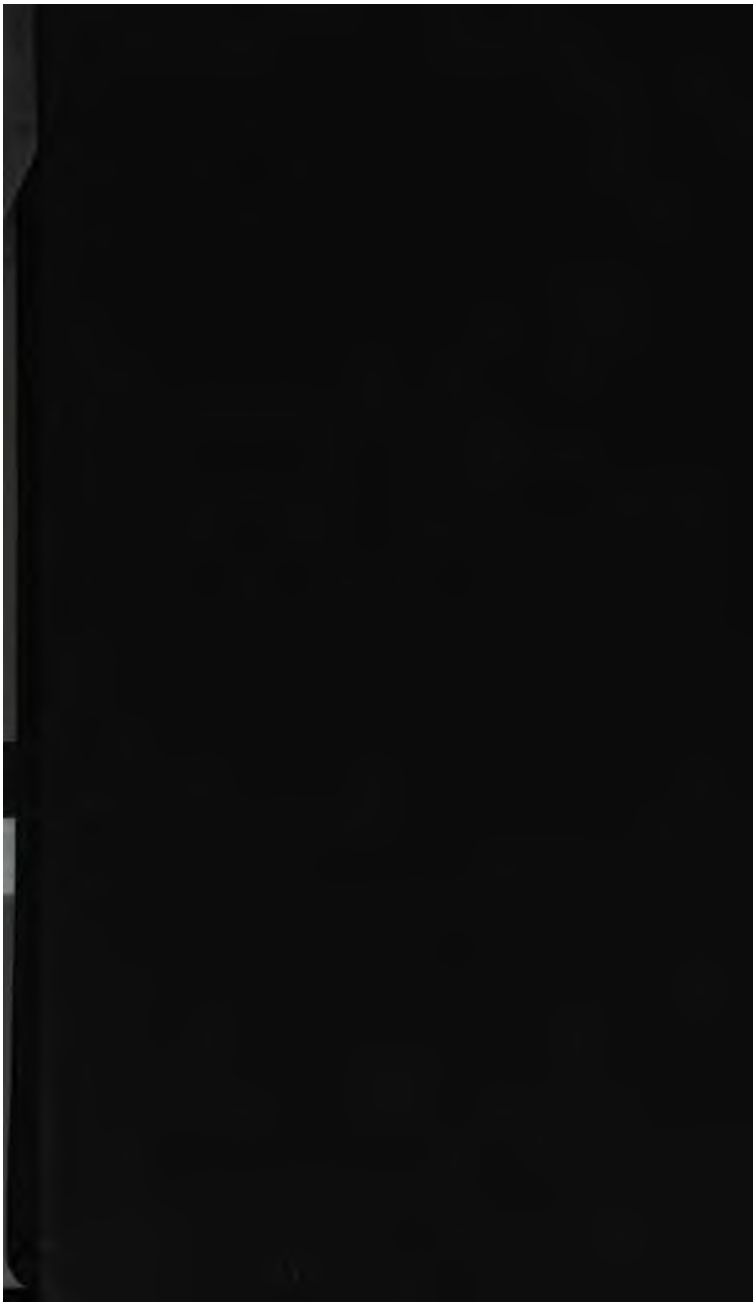
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